



Mentor Training Manual

for the

CREATING A GOSPEL-CENTERED MARRIAGE

Seminar Series





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Mentors in Waiting,

You are being trained for one of the most exciting and rewarding ministries at Summit. You will have the opportunity to bless generations as you share your marriage experience (the wonderful and the challenging; the unique and the mundane) with engaged couples getting ready to embark into marriage.

Pause for a moment and think about how many things in marriage you may have learned “the hard way.”

What are the questions you wish you could have asked a mature couple early in your marriage?

What are your personal stories or lessons that you think would benefit an engaged couple?

Our goal as a Preparing for Marriage ministry is to create an opportunity for you to “fill these gaps” and share those stories with young couples in our church. We want to provide the structure which allows you to do this within a comprehensive marriage ministry so you do not feel the pressure to “cover everything” or be the only voice speaking into their world.

In the pages that follow we will explain how this ministry works and what your role as a mentor will be. For now, I simply want to say “Thank you” for being willing to share your life with engaged couples in our church and community. I believe this ministry will be a joy that God uses not only to bless young couples but to continually breathe new life into your own marriage as well.

In Christ,

Brad Hambrick



Overview of the Mentor Training

In this training we will cover six sections to orient you and train you for your role in Summit's pre-marital mentoring ministry. The content from each section will overlap, but the repetition is designed to help you assimilate the material and complete this training with a high level of understanding about how the mentoring process works.

I. Overview of Preparing for Marriage Page 5

In this section we want you to learn where your role as a marriage mentor fits within the other pieces of our Preparing for Marriage ministry. We want you to know and feel like you are serving on a team even though the meetings you have with your engaged couples will be two-on-two; likely in the privacy of your own home.

- A. Piece One: Engaged Discovery Weekend
- B. Piece Two: Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage Seminars
- C. Piece You: Mentoring

2. Job Description of PFM Mentors Page 6

In this section we want to outline the core responsibilities of being an effective pre-marital mentor. We want you to feel confident that you are accomplishing the essential tasks for the mentoring role within the overall PFM ministry.

3. From Registration to Your Living Room Page 7

In this section you will learn what happens before an engaged couples gets to you. Again, we want you know you're serving on a team. We also want you to be familiar with the people and process you will hear your engaged couple talk about as they describe their PFM experience.

4. The Process of Mentoring Page 10

In this section you will learn (a) the key objectives for each meeting with your engaged couple, (b) how to prepare for each meeting, (c) how to ensure the engaged couple is prepared for each meeting, and (d) when/how to connect an engaged couple to other aspects of the counseling ministry if beneficial or necessary. *We want the process to be clear so that your focus can be on building relationship.*

- I. Meeting One: Get to Know Each Other Page 12
- II. Meeting Two: Foundations Page 19
- III. Meeting Three: Communication Page 20
- IV. Meeting Four: Finances Page 21
- V. Meeting Five: Decision Making Page 22
- VI. Meeting Six: Intimacy Page 23
- VII. "Graduation" Letter Page 24

5. FAQ's Page 25

In this section we provide responses to the frequently asked questions asked by / of marriage mentors. This is a growing list of questions. The most up-to-date material can always be found at www.bradhambrick.com/premaritalmentor.

6. Summit Marriage Mentor Profile Page 29

This is a voluntary form that allows mentors to let us know unique experiences that can allow our mentor coordinator (Jill Sheets, jillesheets@gmail.com) to create matches in some special need cases.

Manual Last Revised February 17, 2014



Overview of Preparing for Marriage

Preparing for Marriage (PFM) is the premarital counseling ministry of The Summit Church. Couples who are married by a Summit Pastor are required to complete this program which consists of three pieces.

Piece One: Engaged Discovery Weekend

This weekend is an all day Saturday and Sunday afternoon event where engaged couples meet with our EDW teaching team and other engaged couples to address issues more specific to your wedding and engagement (schedule is subject to change). If you are interested in serving as a teacher or host for these weekends, you can contact Tom Droege (tldroege@mindspring.com).

Saturday

- 8:00 Registration and Continental Breakfast
- 8:30 Introductions and Overview
- 8:45 Session 1: Foundations in Marriage
- 9:30 *Break Out Session - Foundations*
- 10:15 Break/Snacks
- 10:30 Session 2: Who Am I and Who are You?
- 11:45 *Breakout Session – Couples Project*
- 12:15 LUNCH (provided)
- 1:00 Session 3A: Sex, Intimacy, and Purity (Guest Speaker)
- 1:45 Session 3B: Intimacy Breakout Session: Men and Women Meet Separately
- 2:45 Break/Snacks – Finances Materials
- 3:00 Session 4: Understanding Communication and Conflict
- 3:45 Couples Project – Rules of Engagement
- 4:15 Session 5: Hero Workshops: Men and Women Meet Separately
- 5:00 Break for the Evening
- 5:15 Dinner Out with Group (not included in registration fee)

Sunday

- Morning Worship at Summit
- 12:30 Lunch (provided)
- 1:15 Session 6A: Panel Discussion with Q and A (with guest panel members)
- 2:45 Break/Snacks
- 3:00 Session 7: Boundaries - Protecting Your Marriage
- 3:55 Wrap Up – Prayer and Blessing
- 4:00 Evaluations
- 5:00 Departure

Piece Two: “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage” Seminars

These seminars unpack God’s design for a gospel-centered marriage in five highly practical presentations: (1) Foundations, (2) Communication, (3) Finances, (4) Decision Making, and (5) Intimacy. These seminars also serve as structure upon which much of the mentoring relationship is built.

Piece You: Mentoring

This relationship is what you are here to learn about today. Through mentoring we seek to provide each engaged couple in our church with a mature married couple they can learn from during the engagement and call with questions in their early years of marriage. You will facilitate a discussion of the GCM seminars in a fashion very similar to how a Summit small group leader facilitates a discussion of the weekend sermon.



JOB DESCRIPTION

Position: Pre-Marital Mentor Couple

Summary of Position

A married couple who agrees to invest their time and life experience into the lives of one or more engaged couples as a part of the Preparing for Marriage ministry. Pre-marital mentoring is a lay level involvement in the Summit counseling ministry.

Skills / Knowledge / Experience Required

- A covenant member of The Summit Church
- Married at least 5 years. Marriage is healthy and being actively enriched
- Attended the “Preparing for Marriage” mentor training
- Willingness and ability to share your marital experiences in an authentic, Christ-honoring way

Responsibilities

- Pray with and for your engaged couple regularly
- Schedule at least six discussion meetings that utilize aspects of the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminar series
 - Meeting One: Getting to Know You
 - Meeting Two: Foundations
 - Meeting Three: Communication
 - Meeting Four: Finances
 - Meeting Five: Decision Making
 - Meeting Six: Intimacy
- Be available for other meetings and inquiries. It is encouraged that you meet 3 times after their wedding.
 - 6 weeks after, 3 months after, and 6 months after the wedding
 - If the 6 pre-wedding meetings were not completed before the wedding these follow up meetings can also serve to complete the GCM material
- Encourage all engaged couples to be involved in a small group for ongoing discipleship

Four Objectives of PFM as a Whole

- Prepare engaged couples for real, God-glorifying marriages
- Help couples shift their view of marriage from me-centered to God-centered
- Provide forum for engaged couples to fellowship with experienced married couples
- Connect engaged couples with a breadth of resources for ongoing marital enrichment



From Registration to Your Living Room

How does an engaged couple get to your living room? It is good to know the journey of how a couple arrived on your door step. It will allow you to answer questions they may have about the process and is part of you getting to know them.

Step One: Learn about Preparing for Marriage – Some couples will call the church office and ask to sign up for pre-marital counseling, not knowing we have a dynamic pre-marital ministry. Other couples will have had friends who have been in PFM and know a great deal about the ministry.

- A great way for you to serve PFM is to talk about the ministry. Word of mouth is the best way to **(a)** ensure all the engaged couples in our church know about this ministry and **(b)** raise awareness amongst the couples who would be excited to serve as mentors

Step Two: Register for Preparing for Marriage – Once a couple expresses interest in PFM we ask them to complete a registration form (see page 9) to provide us with the information we need to serve their pre-marital needs. The fee collected goes to offset the Engaged Discovery Weekend and production costs of printed materials.

The couple will receive a letter from Brad Hambrick, Pastor of Counseling, describing PFM and explaining how we'd like them to approach this ministry in order to gain optimal benefit from it during a very busy season of their life (see page 8).

Once this form is received at the Summit office two pieces of communication will be sent to PFM leaders by Amy LaBarr, admin over counseling:

1. Jill Sheets, pre-marital mentoring coordinator, will be sent the couple's name and contact information. Jill will pass this information on to the mentor couple she selects as the best-fit.
2. Tom Droege will be sent the couple's information to let them know of the next available Engaged Discovery Weekends.

Attending/viewing the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminar series may be done at live events or in preparation for each mentor meeting depending upon the time of year and which is feasible for the couple. This allows an engaged couple to matriculate through the PFM program at any time throughout the year and progress throughout the ordered seminars regardless of how when they enter the PFM program coincides with live events.

Step Three: Contact and Scheduling by Mentor Couple (You) – We ask that within 24-48 hours of receiving a mentoring assignment that you contact your engaged couple. When you call, express your excitement about the opportunity to be a part of this season in the couple's life.

Either in this phone call or a follow up interaction set a time to meet with the couple. You can summarize verbally what will happen in the first meeting, but please also use the semi-scripted e-mail correspondence in the next "Process of Mentoring" section in order to ensure that the key preparations are made for each meeting.



Excited Engaged Couple,

If you are reading this letter then I know a few things about you:

1. You are entering a very exciting season that will shape the rest of your life.
2. You are probably overwhelmed with the number of details to plan in the coming weeks/months.
3. You have made the very wise choice to pursue pre-marital counseling.

The Preparing for Marriage Ministry (PFM) at Summit will do an excellent job of preparing you to experience the blessing of marriage as God intended. This ministry has three primary components.

1. The Engaged Discovery Weekend (EDW)
2. The “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage” seminars
3. A Mentoring Relationship

Dates for the EDW and the next seminars can always be found on the PFM page on The City (summitrdu.onthecity.org). Your mentor couple will be contacting you soon. An overview of the things you will cover in this mentor relationship can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

In this letter, I want to help you get the most from your PFM experience. While PFM is filled with excellent content, we do not believe it will be the content that changes the next decades of your married life. We recognize that there is so much going on in your life that absorbing everything you need to know about marriage would be impossible.

We want you to focus on two things in PFM (while retaining as much content as you can in this busy season):

1. **Relationships:** The best thing you can do for your marriage is to surround it with healthy relationships. Throughout the PFM ministry this will be emphasized as you meet with your mentors, attend the EDW with other couples in your season of life, and are encouraged to be in a small group.
2. **Post-Marital Habits:** In PFM you will be exposed to many resources and practices to enrich your marriage. The best questions you can be asking yourself during PFM are, “When and how will we implement these during our first year of marriage?”

We (as a church) are very excited to walk with you; not just during your engagement, but for as long as you call RDU home. We want to hear the stories of the great things God does in/through your marriage and be a part of that journey. Your involvement in PFM is a great next step in that journey.

In Christ,

Brad Hambrick
Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church



PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE Registration Form

We are excited to learn of your engagement and want to affirm your commitment to seek pre-marital counseling through the Preparing for Marriage (PFM) ministry. This is a wise step and we have a team of experience married couples who are excited to help you start your marriage in a healthy, wise, and godly fashion. This form helps us get to know you and gets you plugged into the PFM ministry. Thank you for taking the time to fill it out.

His name: _____ Best way to contact: Phone / E-mail

Phone number: (_____) _____ - _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

His name: _____ Best way to contact: Phone / E-mail

Phone number: (_____) _____ - _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

How long have you known each other? _____

How long did you date? _____

Date of Engagement: ____ / ____ / ____ Projected Wedding Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Are you planning to be married by a Summit pastor? Yes No
 Are you a member of The Summit Church? Yes No
 If not, do you regularly attend The Summit Church? Yes No
 Which campus do you attend? _____
 If you don't, do you attend regularly at another church? Yes No Where? _____

How did you hear about the Preparing for Marriage ministry? _____

NEXT STEP: Return this form to the Summit Church office with a check for \$60 and request information about how to attend or view the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage seminars that will be a part of your mentoring relationship. For more information on this process, please visit www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

We are excited to walk with you towards a healthy, fulfilling, and God-honoring marriage.

For office use only

Marriage Prep Completion List	Completed
1. Foundations	_____
2. Communication	_____
3. Finances	_____
4. Decision Making	_____
5. Intimacy	_____
6. Engaged Discovery Weekend	_____
7. Mentoring	_____

The Process of Mentoring

We have developed two web pages to guide the mentoring process: one for the mentoring couple to reference, another for the engaged couple to reference, but everything can be accessed on the master page – bradhambrick.com/gcm.

- **Engaged Couple Page** (bradhambrick.com/engaged): This page contains the most up-to-date tools / evaluations, links to each of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage seminars, and meeting-by-meeting objective videos.
- **Mentor Couple Page** (bradhambrick.com/premaritalmentor): This page contains everything that is on the /engaged page plus, sample exercises, templates of the form e-mails for you to cut-and-paste, and links to all the FAQ's posts for/from mentors.

The first meeting is set aside to get to know one another. If you leave knowing and liking each other it's been a successful meeting. Relationship is the opportunity to influence, so use the initial exercises with that main purpose in mind.

At the end of the first meeting you will begin the pattern that will be repeated through the sixth meeting. That pattern is (visually portrayed in the chart on the page):

1. (Before Meeting) The engaged couple completes three on-line evaluations for the next GCM seminar.
 - a. You should receive their results by e-mail in advance of your time together.
2. (Majority of Time) Discuss the content decided upon at the end of the previous meeting.
3. (Last 5-7 Minutes) Review the three evaluations and select the subject you will discuss next.
 - a. Encourage the couple to study those sections of the next GCM seminar for the next meeting.
 - b. Set the date for when the next meeting will occur (also marking your calendar for a reminder e-mail).

The form e-mails provided will ensure that the engaged couple knows precisely what they need to complete for each meeting and that they have access to video presentations (if a live presentation of a seminar does not coincide with your meeting). It is recommended that you send this reminder e-mail one week before the meeting to help ensure the couple does not forget to do their homework.

There are several strategic advantages we hope to gain from this seminar-mentoring tandem approach:

- It provides structure for your conversations but flexibility tailor the teaching content for each couple's needs.
- Mentors can share their experience without feeling the pressure of being the "lead teacher."
- The evaluations are in smaller "bite size" units and have recommended resources for each sub topic.
- Couples can study through each seminar with their small group later as community-based marital enrichment.
- It allows for a point of connection with other aspects of the Summit counseling ministry.

Note One: The evaluations for each seminar are progressive in nature. For example, the three evaluations for the communication seminar are listening, day-to-day communication, and conflict resolution. This is an intentional order. Couples who do not listen well will not communicate well. Couples who do a poor job in day-to-day communication will inadequately know one another and, thereby, be impaired in their conflict resolution. The implication for mentors is this:

Implication: If scores are equal among the three evaluations, then it will most often be wise to begin with the material from the first evaluation (unless we advise otherwise in this training material).

Note Two: The first chapter of each GCM seminar outlines 20 common challenges for that topic. This will rarely be something to discuss through with the engaged couple (it would be too time cumbersome and probably feel negative). But it is likely a place for you and your spouse to review before the meeting to help you recall some of your best examples and illustrations to reference in the discussion.

Six Meeting Flow Chart

Meeting One

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) Sketching Our Story Exercise | (4) Expectations On-Line Evaluation |
| (2) Celebrating Our Non-Moral Differences | (5) Marriage as Covenant On-line Evaluation |
| (3) Purity Covenant | (6) Gender Roles On-Line Evaluation |

Conversation Focus: Get to know your engaged couple (history and personality) and allow them to get to know you. Review the purity covenant and ask the couple to make this commitment to one another.

Concluding Conversation: Review the three evaluations for the "Foundations" seminar and select the focal point of meeting two based upon (a) scoring of the evaluations and (b) couple's most pressing questions.

Meeting Two

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| (1) Attend / Watch Seminar Assignment | (3) Day-to-Day Communication On-Line Evaluation |
| (2) Listening On-Line Evaluation | (4) Conflict Resolution On-Line Evaluation |

Conversation Focus: To screen for red flags in the engaged couple's relationship and help them think through the covenant relationship they are forming – something that will be unique from anything they have experienced to this point in their life.

Concluding Conversation: Review the three evaluations for the "Communication" seminar and select the focal point of meeting two based upon (a) scoring of the evaluations and (b) couple's most pressing questions.

Meeting Three

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) Attend / Watch Seminar Assignment | (3) Budgeting Process On-Line Evaluation |
| (2) Money Beliefs & Character On-Line Evaluation | (4) Approach to Debt & Savings On-Line Evaluation |

Conversation Focus: To assess and assist the engaged couple in three key areas of communication.

Concluding Conversation: Review the three evaluations for the "Finances" seminar and select the focal point of meeting two based upon (a) scoring of the evaluations and (b) couple's most pressing questions.

Meeting Four

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) Attend / Watch Seminar Assignment | (3) Consensus Decision Making On-Line Evaluation |
| (2) Personal Decision Making On-Line Evaluation | (4) Headship-Submission Decision Making Evaluation |

Conversation Focus: To make sure that the engaged couple knows how to create and administrate a family budget. Financial problems are the number one cited reason/contributor to divorce. This material is more than just "practical."

Concluding Conversation: Review the three evaluations for the "Decision Making" seminar and select the focal point of meeting two based upon (a) scoring of the evaluations and (b) couple's most pressing questions.

Meeting Five

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) Attend / Watch Seminar Assignment | (3) Giving / Receiving Love On-Line Evaluation |
| (2) Living in the Gospel Story On-Line Evaluation | (4) Being an Excellent Lover On-Line Evaluation |

Conversation Focus: To help the engaged couple think through how to make decisions that arrive at God's will as individuals (personally), friends (consensus), and through headship-submission.

Concluding Conversation: Review the three evaluations for the "Intimacy" seminar and select the focal point of meeting two based upon (a) scoring of the evaluations and (b) couple's most pressing questions.

Meeting Six

- (1) Attend / Watch Seminar Assignment

Conversation Focus: To help the engaged couple learn how to maintain a healthy romantic marriage that is mutually satisfying, other-minded, and growing deeper over the course of decades of marriage.

Concluding Conversation: Identify the dates and times when you will get together after the wedding.

Meeting One

Story and Personality

Primary Objective: Get to know your engaged couple and allow them to get to know you.

Content Areas: History (personal and relational) and Personality

Tools:

1. Sketching Our Marriage Story – This tool allows a couple to tell their story from birth to wedding/engagement. There is a second version you can use to also tell your story from wedding to now. Use this to get know the defining events in the life of your couple and to allow them to know your marital journey.
2. Celebrating Our Non-Moral Differences – This tool looks at many different personality traits. As you discuss this tool, look for a chance to emphasize three points: (a) these differences are not moral so couples have to resist viewing these traits as good-bad, (b) how you and your spouse have navigated your differences, and (c) how you and your spouse have changed in these areas since you got married.
3. Purity Covenant – We ask each couple to sign a purity covenant as an indication of their desire to put their marriage in the best position to flourish for a lifetime. There is a video from Brad Hambrick discussing the purity covenant on the www.bradhambrick.com/engaged page, so the couple should be expecting and understand this conversation.

Note: As you leave this mentor training your first assignment is to complete these two tools and discuss them with your spouse. These are the only two pieces of the mentoring process that will necessarily be the same in each mentoring relationship.

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We are excited to get together [day] [time] [place] [address, if needed]. We are praying for each of you and your marriage. Getting to be a part of this season in your life is an honor and something we hope is a blessing to you.

[Personal note referencing something you learned in the scheduling phone call.]

In preparation for the first meeting there are a few things you need to do. Go to www.bradhambrick.com/engaged and complete the three exercises under “Preparation for Meeting One.” We have also done these exercises and look forward to using them get to know the two of you better. My husband/wife and I had a great time discussing them and learned more about each other even after # years.

At the end of this first meeting we will also identify what subject(s) we’ll discuss in our second meeting. That means there is a little more work for this first meeting. If you can also complete the three on-line evaluations under “Preparing for Meeting One” and forward the results to this e-mail address, we will look at those and decide what to focus on in our second meeting.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].

Learning to Tell Your Story

Stories are made up events, but a story is larger than the events that comprise it. This will be a guiding principle as you learn to tell your marriage story. You will begin by listing formative events in your life, courtship, and marriage. But telling your life-marriage story is about more than building a chronologically-arranged list of events.

Events: Begin each worksheet by writing in the key life events which shaped you in the order in which they happened. Questions to prompt you in this part of the exercise are included in each section below. For “Birth to Wedding” general time markers are given to help you outline these events. In the other two, it would be wise to begin by charting the time periods that will divide that segment of your life-marriage story.

Experience: After you list the key events, it is helpful to assess how you experienced those events. A simple “-5” to “+5” scale has been provided. These represent pleasant (peaceful, joyful, excited, etc...) and unpleasant (i.e., angry, anxious, grieving, etc...) responses to each item. From this you should begin to be able to see what the major seasons of your life-marriage have been like: good seasons (+3 to +5), bad seasons (-3 to -5), mixed seasons, and “blah” seasons (-2 to +2).

In this part of the chart place an “x” where that event ranks on the unpleasant-to-pleasant spectrum. Once you have completed the list and rated the experience of each event, connect the dots to give yourself a visual of how that section of your life story has unfolded. A sample of this completed exercise is provided at www.bradhambrick.com/foundations.

You should begin to notice whether the major shifts (good or bad) in your life have been the result of your choices or situational changes outside your control. You can probably begin to notice where your instincts towards trust or mistrust gained their current force.

Meaning: There is a “comment” box beside each event for you to summarize how you originally understood the significance of that event upon you. Comments can be serious or playful, but they should accurately represent the way that event actually impacted you at that time.

What were the common themes you used to interpret the pleasant parts of your life? What were the common themes you used to interpret the unpleasant parts of your life? These are probably the same themes that you use to interpret the pleasant and unpleasant events in your marriage today. Until we see that we are interpreters of life, we are slaves to the interpretations that come to us naturally.

You should begin to notice how you responded to things “in the moment” compared with the significance you give them now. Too often, we only attribute this difference to the passing of time, but most often it is not time that creates change but a *change in perspective* (which is just a more common phrase for looking at the same facts from the vantage point of a different “story”).

We will come back to this column when we begin the process of making sense of our life in light of the “Grand Narrative” of the gospel. We cannot change the “events” column. We cannot change the “experience” columns, at least not our initial reaction. But we can, by God’s grace, change the “meaning” column. Even in light of the gospel, not everything in this column will become pleasant (that is the prosperity gospel, which is a false gospel). But we can interpret our successes and failures, blessings and trials, in a way that protects our marriage from the threats of pride, insecurity, and mistrust.

An exciting, and sometimes unsettling, part of marriage is that two individual stories are becoming one shared story. From the wedding forward, you have two individual histories with a shared present and future. The first chart gives clarity about what has been joined together by your marriage covenant and what is being weaved into one by your married life.

What should you include in your life-marriage story?

- Key events – vacations, accomplishments, tragedies, moves, family changes, secrets
- Key people – family members, teachers, church leaders, coaches, friends
- Major interests – hobbies, sports, organizations
- Significant decisions – good and bad
- Spiritual markers – good and bad
- Accomplishments – goals/dreams set, disappointments, points of progress, and completion
- Jobs – skills developed, key connections established, life-direction determined
- Maturation markers – personal, emotional, relational
- Courtship – meeting your spouse, falling in love, obstacles to relationship, learning each other



Sketching our Marriage Story

Birth to Wedding

	Unpleasant Experience					Pleasant Experience					Comments
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	
Birth											
Elementary Age											
Middle School Age											
High School Age											
College Age											
After											

Modified and adapted from *Preparing for Marriage* edited by Dennis Rainey (pages 36-37)

Gospel as the “Grand Narrative”

Most people are unable to talk about the gospel as the theme of their life because they have never thought through their life as a story. Hopefully, your work in the previous sections has removed this obstacle for you and your spouse. This section moves the three story exercises from merely reflective-relational exercises to tracing the hand of God through your life, marriage, fears, and dreams.

The gospel doesn’t rewrite your story; it reinterprets your story. The facts of your life will not change, but the significance of those facts has (or, at least, can) change significantly. For this reason, it is suggested that you use color, more than words, to identify where the core themes of the gospel appear in your life-marriage story. The “x’s” and line will not move, but they will become three dimensional and multi-colored.

The chart below contains the major themes of the gospel and a color-coding system. Use these colors to trace the line that runs through your charts. In some areas the colors may stack like a rainbow as you see multiple themes surrounding the same event.

Theme	Description	Color
God’s Faithfulness	The gospel begins with God’s faithfulness. Before, during, and after our sin and its affects, God is faithful. That is our hope. As the King of Kings (purple for royalty), we can count on God to be faithful. Where do you see God’s faithfulness in your story?	Purple
Sin & Suffering	The gospel is needed because of the marring affects of sin and suffering upon our lives. We are born corrupted by sin. We live in a broken world with people who will hurt us. Our lives are marred (black like spilled ink on a work of art) by these realities. Where do you see sin and suffering in your story?	Black
Undeserved Love	We could not fix ourselves or make up for the wrongs we had done. We deserved punishment and rejection, but Christ lived the perfect life necessary to merit heaven and died the death we deserved (red represents his blood) in order to demonstrate the depth of God’s great love for us. Where do see God’s love and grace in your story?	Red
Faith / Hope	A story filled with sin and suffering should be a dark story. Whenever we experience faith and hope (yellow like the breaking of the morning sun) it is intended to be a reminder that our story has been invaded by Someone greater than our sin and suffering. Where do you see the themes of faith and hope in your story?	Yellow
Joy	Laughter is the privilege of those who feel safe. Soldiers in battle don’t make jokes. Pleasure and joy are common-grace tastes of what God intends for His people and are meant to remind us of the home, Heaven, God provides for those who accept His gift of grace (orange for warm and inviting). Where do you see the theme of joy in your story?	Orange
Generosity	Without the gospel we live in a context of limited time, love, and resources. Before we experience the gospel, life is about getting as much of “it” (whatever you value most) as you can. Once we are filled with God’s love we are freed to be generous (green represents money, which is commonly associated with generosity). Where do you see the theme of generosity (in yourself and others) in your story?	Green
Community	We are saved <i>by grace through faith into</i> a community called the church. This is how we realize that our life is about more than ourselves (blue to indicate the breadth of God’s body, like the sky). Where do you see the theme of Christian community in your story?	Blue
Perseverance	By the gospel God forgives our sin (justification) and shapes our character (sanctification). Character shaping is the process by which God makes us like Jesus (brown for steady, solid growth like a tree). Where do you see the theme of perseverance in your story?	Brown
Surprise	Because of the truths of the gospel we are able to trust God with the unexpected, and God rarely works as we expect Him (asterisk to represent something out of the ordinary). Where do you see God’s unexpected hand guiding your story?	Asterisk (*)

Now that you have completed tracing the gospel themes through your story, examine what you wrote as the significance or meaning of each event in the “comments” column. What did you learn, re-learn, or unlearn about God, the gospel, and your story?

Celebrating Our Non-Moral Marital Differences

Introduction: The longer we are married, the easier it can be to view the ways our spouse is different from us as "bad" (moral language) or as a sign of incompatibility (threatening language). This exercise is meant to help you see and celebrate the non-moral differences between you and your spouse. The attributes listed are neither morally good nor morally bad. Neither side nor the center is necessarily "holy." If you view these characteristics as moral qualities it will be harmful to your marriage. Your responsibility is to celebrate how God made your spouse and put the gospel on display finding ways to express loving unity in the midst of non-moral diversity.

Instructions: Write your initials where you believe you are on each spectrum. Write your spouse's initials where you believe he/she is on each spectrum. Compare your assessment with your spouse's assessment. Talk about (a) ways the two of you have viewed your differences as "bad" and this has caused conflict, (b) ways that your differences compliment one another well, and (c) how you have changed over the last few years.

Attribute	Scale	Attribute
Extrovert	_____	Introvert
Bold	_____	Timid
Calm	_____	Excitable
Reserved	_____	Expressive
Optimistic	_____	Pessimistic
Flexible	_____	Structured
Logical	_____	Emotional
Athletic	_____	Non-Athletic
Loud	_____	Quiet
Sentimental	_____	Stoic
Outdoors	_____	Indoors
Trusting	_____	Cautious
Detailed	_____	Generalizer
Organized	_____	Disorganized
Confident	_____	Insecure
Spender	_____	Saver
Conventional	_____	Unconventional
Leader	_____	Follower
Punctual	_____	Non-punctual
Aggressive	_____	Passive

Modified and adapted from *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* by Wayne Mack (p. 11)



PURITY COVENANT

Biblical Standard

I Thessalonians 4:3-8: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”

**IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S COMMAND,
I PROMISE TO PROTECT YOUR SEXUAL PURITY FROM THIS DAY
UNTIL OUR HONEYMOON.**

Biblical Standard

I Corinthians 6:18-20: “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been brought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

**BECAUSE I RESPECT AND HONOR YOU,
I COMMIT TO BUILDING UP THE INNER PERSON OF YOUR HEART
RATHER THAN VIOLATING YOU.**

Biblical Standard

Acts 24:16: “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”

**I PLEDGE TO SHOW MY LOVE FOR YOU
IN WAYS THAT ALLOW BOTH OF US TO MAINTAIN A CLEAR CONSCIENCE
BEFORE GOD AND EACH OTHER.**

This is our promise of purity to God and one another

Fiance Signature

Fiance Signature

*** Adapted from *Preparing for Marriage* edited by Dennis Rainey (pages 238-239)

If you are living together and this prevents you from being able to sign this covenant, then please talk to your mentor couple about this challenge and visit the conversation starter video at www.bradhambrick.com/cohabitation.

Meeting Two

Foundations

Primary Objective: To screen for red flags in the engaged couples relationship and help them think through how they need to think about the kind of covenant relationship they are forming – something that will be unique from anything they have experienced to this point in their life.

Content Areas: Expectations, Covenant, Husband-Wife Roles

Tools:

1. **Healthy Expectations** – Pay careful attention to the “red flags” section of this evaluation. Any CD or SD answers should be discussed. If there are concerns, then directing the couple to www.summitrdu.com/counseling for additional assistance is advisable. Otherwise you’re looking to make sure the couple knows each other well and has realistic expectations for marriage.
2. **Covenant** – In marriage we transition from me (singular) to we (plural) thinking. This can be hard for many couples. Also, this assessment looks at relationships with in-laws.
3. * **Character and Role Expectations** – Too often husband-wife roles are reduced to lead-follow. This assessment looks at the Christ-like character, healthy friendship qualities, and functional approach to life that are necessary for biblical gender roles to be a blessing to a marriage.

The asterisk (*) means this is the recommended portion of this seminar to focus upon in your mentor meeting unless there is significant reason to focus upon a different section.

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We greatly enjoyed our first meeting. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At the first meeting we decided we would cover [subject]. Be sure you’ve taken time to review those sections in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Foundations* (www.bradhambrick.com/gcmfoundations) seminar. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

At the end of this second meeting we will also identify what subject(s) we’ll discuss in our third meeting (just like we did last time). If you can also complete the three brief evaluations under “Preparing for Meeting Two,” we will look at those and decide what to focus on in meeting three.

All the materials you will need can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].

Meeting Three

Communication

Primary Objective: To assess and assist the engaged couple in three key areas of communication.

Content Areas: Listening, Day-to-Day Communication, Conflict Resolution

Tools:

1. **Listening Evaluation** – A couple will never communicate better than they listen. This is an often over-looked skill that is an essential part of a gospel-centered marriage. Can you imagine your Christian life without prayer?
2. **Day-to-Day Communication Evaluation** – One of the key changes from dating to marriage is day-to-day communication. The longer a couple is married the better they know one another and (if we're not careful) the less we think we have to talk about.
3. **Conflict Resolution Evaluation** – Moments of disagreement will have a profound impact on a marriage. If these moments are done well, they can be the best friend of a marriage as a couple reinforces that "it" (whatever we're arguing about) is not more important than "us."

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We greatly enjoyed our second meeting. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At the first meeting we decided we would cover [subject]. Be sure you've taken time to review those sections in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Communication* (www.bradhambrick.com/gcmcommunication) seminar. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

At the end of this third meeting we will also identify what subject(s) we'll discuss in our fourth meeting (just like we've done the last two times). If you can also complete the three brief evaluations under "Preparing for Meeting Three," we will look at those and decide what to focus on in meeting four.

All the materials you will need can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].



Meeting Four

Finances

Primary Objective: To make sure that the engaged couple knows how to create and administrate a family budget. Financial problems are the number one cited reason/contributor to divorce. This material is more than just “practical.”

Content Areas: Beliefs about Money, Budgeting Process, Eliminating Debt and Saving

Tools:

1. **Beliefs about Money and Financial Character** – A couple will not be unified in how they spend money unless they believe similar things about money. How we spend our money and whether a couple honors their commitment to one another about their budget is a character issue central to trust.
2. * **The Budgeting Process** – A couple must have a defined process by which they administrate their budget if they are going to maintain fidelity to any financial plan in the midst of a busy life where we have more “wants” than resources. Agreeing on and sticking to this process is essential to maintain marital unity.
3. **Approach to Debt and Saving** – Many young couples will have debt that complicates creating and maintaining a budget. This section reviews the key practices and lifestyle changes necessary to eliminate debt and begin saving.

The asterisk (*) means this is the recommended portion of this seminar to focus upon in your mentor meeting unless there is significant reason to focus upon a different section.

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We greatly enjoyed our third meeting. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At the third meeting we decided we would cover [subject]. Be sure you’ve taken time to review those sections in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Finances* (www.bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances) seminar. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

At the end of this fourth meeting we will also identify what subject(s) we’ll discuss in our fifth meeting (just like we done each time). If you can also complete the three brief evaluations under “Preparing for Meeting Four,” we will look at those and decide what to focus on in meeting five.

All the materials you will need can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [####-####-#####].

Meeting Five

Decision Making

Primary Objective: To help the engaged couple think through how to make decisions that arrive at God's will as individuals (personally), friends (consensus), and through headship-submission.

Content Areas: Personal Decision Making, Consensus Decision Making, Headship-Submission Decision Making

Tools:

1. **Personal Decision Making** – The foundation for good marital decision making is two individuals who are able to make God-honoring decisions. Unless a couple agrees on how to make decisions that arrive at the will of God individually, they will be impaired in their ability to do so as a couple.
2. **Consensus Decision Making** – Not all (or even most) joint decision making as a couple is based upon the biblical teaching on headship and submission. A couple needs to agree upon which decisions fit in the “consensus” category and how to approach these decisions.
3. **Headship-Submission Decision Making** – A couple will not always agree on important decisions, but doing a good job with personal and consensus decision making will make these disagreements more rare. These are pivotal moments in the life of a marriage that will have a profound effect on trust. A Christian couple needs to have an understanding of what headship and submission looks like in these times in order to navigate them well.

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We greatly enjoyed our fourth meeting. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At the fourth meeting we decided we would cover [subject]. Be sure you've taken time to review those sections in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Decision Making* (www.bradhambrick.com/gcmdecisionmaking) seminar. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

At the end of this fifth meeting we will also identify what subject(s) we'll discuss in our sixth meeting (just like we have done each time). If you can also complete the first two evaluations under “Preparing for Meeting Five,” we will look at those and decide what to focus on in meeting six. The third evaluation is more designed for the two of you to discuss in preparation for your honeymoon.

All the materials you will need can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].

Meeting Six

Intimacy

Primary Objective: To help the engaged couple learn how to maintain a healthy romantic marriage that is mutually satisfying, other-minded, and growing deeper over the course of decades of marriage.

Note: The “sex talk” portions of this material are covered in the Engaged Discovery Weekend, so mentors who may be uncomfortable broaching this subject can focus their attention on the romantic more than the physical aspects of intimacy.

Content Areas: Preferences in Giving/Receiving Love, Living in the Larger Love Story, Being an Excellent Lover

Tools:

1. **Preferences in Giving/Receiving Love** – We tend to be most self-centered with the things we enjoy the most. That is one of the greatest challenges of romantic love: we know how we enjoy it and often assume the same of our spouse. This evaluation helps couples identify and discuss their preference in giving/receiving love.
2. **Living in the Larger Love Story** – Most “love stories” tend to be highly idealistic. A gospel-centered marriage is able to maintain (even grow) romance in the face of sin and suffering because it is rooted in “the love story” that is both real and tender. This evaluation helps couples assess how well they are prepared to live their marriage (with its blessing and challenges) in God’s story and, thereby, give more meaning to their intimacy.
3. **Being an Excellent Lover** – (We hope engaged couples will not be able to begin answering this evaluation until after the honey moon.) In the mentor relationship it will be sufficient to say that the items on this evaluation reveal the kind of conversations a couple should have about sex. The design is that this evaluation helps the newly married couple initiate conversations about sex that are often unasked and, thereby, decrease the level of “knowing” each other and pleasing each other that God intended sex to facilitate.

Form E-mail:

This e-mail should be sent one week before meeting. Feel free to personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

It amazing to think we are coming up on our sixth meeting. It has been fun, so time has flown. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At the first meeting we decided we would cover [subject]. Be sure you’ve taken time to review those sections in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Intimacy* seminar. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

At the end of this meeting we will talk about when we want to meet after the wedding. If you guys can be giving that some thought, we can go ahead and get that on our calendars.

All the materials you will need can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/engaged.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].



www.SummitRDU.com • 2335-114 Presidential Drive, Durham, NC 27703 • 919.383.7100

Engaged-Newlywed Couple,

Whether this letter finds you just before or just after your wedding, it signifies that you have faithfully completed the Preparing for Marriage program (PFM). We want to commend you for investing in your marriage over the last several months. You will never regret having laid a solid foundation for your most enduring relationship.

The question before you is, "What now? Now that we've completed PFM, what could or should we do to enrich our marriage and make our home a place increasingly marked by the gospel?" I would like to make a few suggestions that we recommend to everyone completing PFM.

- Stay in touch with your mentors. Their presence and role in your life should extend well beyond six meetings before your wedding. Especially during the first year of marriage connect with them when you have questions, face challenges, or make memories. Let them be a Romans 12:15 presence in your marriage.
- Be in a small group. Few things are more important to your marriage than to be part of a small group where you are honest about life's challenges, encouraged, and reminded of the things that are most important.
- Study one "Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage" seminar with your small group each year for the first five years of your marriage. Your mentors can advise you which one to start with. This is a great way to review and implement all the things you "learned and wanted to do" during your time in PFM.
- On your **one year anniversary** volunteer to be on the panel at an Engaged Discovery Weekend. This is a great way to reminisce about all God has taught you and share that with engaged couples wondering what their first year will be like. Contact Tom Droege (tldroege@mindspring.com) about this opportunity.
- **After 2-3 years of marriage** consider joining the Engaged Discovery Weekend ministry as either a host or teacher as another way to invest back in PFM. Tom Droege is also the contact person for this opportunity.
- **After 5 years of marriage** enrich another to-be marriage by becoming mentors. Begin praying now that your marriage will be a marriage to emulate. If you do the things outlined above, there is no reason God cannot bless you with a home that would be a launching point for many future gospel-centered marriages. Contact Jill Sheets (jillesheets@gmail.com) about this opportunity.

Your mentors have a few recommendations and words of encouragement based upon the time they're shared with you.

We pray that the PFM ministry will continue to be a blessing to and through your marriage for years to come.

Congratulations,

Brad Hambrick
Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church

FAQ's

1. What if the couple comes into the program late (close to their wedding)?

Honestly, this should be expected more often than not. This is why we put the “red flag” screening in the evaluation discussed at the end of the first session (more will be said about this in the next question).

We (as a church) cannot be a social engineer; forcing couples to do things in an ideal fashion. We can provide excellent comprehensive (content and relationship) pre-marital preparation. We can also do a better job of making this resource known throughout our church and community so that more couples enter PFM early in their engagement.

Our advisement to you with couples who enter PFM late is:

1. Remain positive and upbeat about being a part of this season in their life.
2. Screen for red flags in the first meeting (if significant problems are found, see the next question).
3. If no red flags are found, stay on the normal schedule (meeting on somewhere between a 2-5 week interval).
4. Allow the post-wedding meetings to cover the subjects that were not addressed before the wedding.

2. What if we think they need to meet with a more experienced counselor? What if we think they do not need to get married... at least not in the time frame they've set?

This is the minority experience for marriage mentors. So as we examine this question do not assume this will be something that you will wrestle with in most of your mentoring relationships.

First, you need to remember that you are an advisor. There are limits to this role. You can make wise, well-informed advisements with clear practical next steps. After that, there is not much control. That is often the hardest part for compassionate people want to be involved in a counseling-related ministry.

Second, as a church, we may decide that the issue is problematic enough that our one of our pastors cannot, in good conscience, perform the wedding ceremony. Even in this, we do not have the level of influence that can require a couple to delay or reconsider their decision to marry.

The advisements below are detailed in an intentional order which we ask our mentors to follow when addressing these kinds of concerns:

1. Listen. A great rule of thumb for all things counseling-related is, “If you don’t know what to say, ask more questions.” Rest in the reality you will not be making a decision for the couple, but only a recommendation.
2. If the concern is minor, you may begin by recommending the couple study that seminar with their small group in their first year of marriage. If they are not in a small group, invite them to yours and ask your small group to study that seminar to allow the newlywed couple to benefit from the experience of many couples in that area.
3. If the concern is moderate to severe, you should connect them with the formal counseling ministries of the Summit (www.summitrdu.com/counseling). The link provided will connect the couple with the various options for personal and marital counseling that we offer.
4. If the couple does not adhere to your concern and is being married by a Summit pastor, then let the couple know that you feel the concern is significant enough that you should share it with the Summit pastor performing the ceremony so that he can help assess if your concerns warrant further attention.
5. Unless your concerns involve something illegal or a safety consideration, continue to care for the couple as their mentor. Relationship is influence and, if the couple is engaging with the GCM materials, your concerns may begin to take on greater weight with the couple as they learn more of what God designed marriage to be.

3. What if we're uncomfortable talking about [blank] or don't feel like we do a good job with [blank]?

Mentors are not expected to be excellent or expects at every area of marriage. That would be an unrealistic expectation to put on any couple. One of the greatest facets of the mentoring relationship will be for the engaged couple to learn how to talk about their strengths and weaknesses in a grace-based environment. You will teach this by modeling how to talk about your own strengths and weaknesses as a couple.

If there is a specific subject you prefer not to address, hopefully you can find a facet of the broader subject to address. For instance, if you are uncomfortable talking about debt, then within the "finances" section you could direct the conversation towards budgeting.

If you are uncomfortable with an entire subject, then you might enlist a couple from your small group to take that meeting. In that case you would want to explain to your couple that you want them to have someone more skilled or consistent in that area to discuss that subject with them.

More often than not (unless this is a point of active division between you and your spouse), then the seminar will cover the "how to" and provide the tools for each subject. The role of the mentor is to provide testimony to the content of each seminar and be a relational resource who gets to know the couple well enough to guide them through the trail-and-error process of implementation.

4. What should we know about pre-marital couples (just in case we forgot what this season of life was like)?

The following seven points are taken from *Preparing for Marriage: Leader's Guide* edited by Dennis Rainey (p. 24-25).

- Many engaged couples are wearing blinders. An engaged person is often aware of negative characteristics in the one he or she loves, but figures, "It won't be like that when we're married." In their excitement, they often fail to think rationally about potential problems that could sabotage the relationship believing instead that "love conquers all." They are setting up themselves for disappointment when reality sets in.
- Because of the hectic schedule leading up to the wedding and honeymoon, engaged couples are experiencing one of the most stressful times of their lives. Often couples will get less sleep during this time which naturally adds stress to the relationship.
- This stress can cause couples to experience extremes in emotions as well. Be ready to talk through their sudden doubts about marriage if they arise. Those who begin to have doubts about whether this marriage is right will feel tremendous pressure to go ahead with the wedding anyway.
- In this time, those who are not already having intercourse are struggling with keeping their desires in check. They are physically charged yet fatigued, making it hard to draw boundaries. Couple often sacrifice some biblical values for the sake of the relationship.
- Often couples have had very little time to discuss normal financial habits and expenses. They may need to discuss the ever-growing expenses of a wedding as well.
- Often couples will need to discuss differences of opinion in wedding plans (i.e., expenses, in-laws expectations, alcohol, etc...).
- A significant number of couples have discussed only in part how their past has affected them. Many don't know about serious relational baggage they are bringing in the marriage.

5. Are there articles or books I need to be reading?

We would recommend beginning with the reading the five seminar manuals in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminar series. These will expose you to those materials that we believe are most consistent with the preaching and teaching of The Summit Church. In the process you will identify those books, subjects, or authors that would best enrich your marriage.

We would also recommend the marriage conferences presented by Family Life Today (www.familylife.com/events). These events are frequently hosted in or near RDU and are excellent.



As other excellent events come to or near RDU we will post those in “Preparing for Marriage” group on The City.

Brad Hambrick, pastor of counseling, also frequently posts materials about marriage on his blog www.bradhambrick.com.

6. What if we learn the couple is living together?

The principles from question #2 apply to this situation. Our church policy is that a Summit pastor will not perform the wedding for a couple who are living together before marriage. So if this issue arises and a Summit pastor is unaware, please let that pastor know.

However, we want this subject to start a conversation rather than end it, so we have created a video to address this common issue (www.bradhambrick.com/cohabitation). If your couple is living together and doesn't understand or agree with Summit's policy, there are two advisements we would make:

1. Continue to meet with the couple. We want the opportunity to influence them with biblical, gospel-centered teaching as much as they will allow. You, as mentors, are one of the churches primary means of doing so.
2. Encourage them to watch the video (script below) and consider acting on the recommendations made at the end.

Cohabitation: A Conversation Starter by Brad Hambrick

When dating or engaged couples are preparing for marriage they often ask questions like this one:

My fiancé and I are getting married in a few months, but have been living together for a while. When we were doing our pre-marital counseling we were told living together before marriage was wrong and that we should live separately until we're married. We want to honor God, but don't understand why this is a big deal if we love each other and will be married in a few months anyway. We're not trying to be rebellious, but we want to understand why a change like this would be necessary.

That's a good, honest question. Let me start by saying if you're thinking about marriage, that's a good thing. Marriage can be one of God's greatest earthly blessings. Our goal at The Summit Church is to help you lay the best possible foundation for a lasting and satisfying marriage.

But both statistics and the Bible indicate that living together before marriage decreases the quality and longevity of marriage. We don't think we would be a good friend to you, your relationship, or future marriage if we didn't raise this concern for you to consider.

Secular studies (meaning those without a “Christian bias”) consistently show several things.

- The divorce rate is higher among couples who live together before they marry. Consider these statistics...
 - ... about 50% of all marriages end in divorce.
 - ... but 67% of couples who cohabit before marriage divorce.
 - ... while only 30-40% of first marriages who don't cohabit before marriage end in divorce.
 - That means living together before marriage makes divorce twice as likely for a first marriage.
- Even the health and financial benefits commonly associated with marriage are less for couples who cohabit before marriage.
- And the sex life of couples who cohabit before marriage is not as strong as those who don't.
- Actually, the only “benefit” from cohabiting found in secular studies is that live-in boyfriends do more housework, on average, than married men.

I'll let you make sense of the last point and make that a point of emphasis at our next men's event.



There are many sociological reasons for these statistics, that could be discussed but that would come across as “piling on.” We do believe these statistics point to a deeper spiritual reality – God created marriage and assigned living together and sex as special privileges that come with marriage. From the very beginning of creation God gave the pattern for marriage:

When doing the first marriage ceremony in **Genesis 2:24** God says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

In **John 4:18** when Jesus was having one of His more famous conversations with the woman at the well one of the things He pointed out to call her to repentance is that the man she was living with was not her husband.

Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.”

The Bible is clear that God made marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. God created marriage and it is when we follow His pattern that we experience the blessing God intended marriage to be.

If the idea of marriage-as-covenant is new or confusing to you, I would recommend the video at bradhambrick.com/covenant. This video will help you see the significance of the marriage ceremony as a covenant making ceremony.

There are many reasons why couples believe it is necessary or “more practical” to live together before marriage:

- Financial benefit of one rent or mortgage payment
- “Try out” marriage to make sure you’re compatible
- Thinking it would damage your relationship to split up before marriage

But if these perceived benefits were actually helpful, then the statistics would not be what they are. My goal here isn’t to debate you through a computer screen. We’re not trying to “win an argument.” Instead, we (as a church) want to come alongside you and help you honor God in your marital preparation.

Here is what we would ask you to consider doing next:

- Commit to honor God and give your marriage the best opportunity to flourish by choosing to live separately and abstain from sex until you are married.
- If you think this is not possible for financial reasons, let your small group leader or a Summit pastor know so we can help you with living arrangements. You don’t have to follow God alone. You have a church family to help you in this journey.
- Continue or begin in our church’s Preparing for Marriage ministry. Information about this program can be found at summitrdu.com/pfm. The more you learn about God’s design for marriage the more the principles of this conversation will make sense to you.

Last of all, I want to say “thank you” for taking these few minutes to consider how to put your marriage in the best position to succeed. That is a sign of humility and maturity which should be a blessing to your marriage for years to come. We want The Summit to be a safe place for the two of you to follow God together and experience the joy of life together as God designed.



Summit Marriage Mentor Profile

We often have occasions when an engaged couple requests a mentor couple who have faced similar life or relational challenges, have similar career or ministry aspirations, different ethnic backgrounds, blended family, difficult in-law relationships, having dated long distance, etc...

If there are aspects of your personal or marital story that you are willing to share and believe might help us in connecting you with engaged couples you could uniquely benefit, we would appreciate having that information.

This information can be sent directly to Jill Sheets (jillesheets@gmail.com), or marriage mentoring coordinator. If you prefer to share such information verbally, rather than in writing, Jill is happy to set a time to talk over the phone.

Husband's Experiences

Wife' Experiences

Shared Marital Experiences

Note: The high demand for marriage mentors that we regularly experience means that when a special fit case comes, you will likely already be mentoring an engaged couple. If a special fit case presents itself that will likely require you to take on a second mentoring relationship for that season of time.