

A Study Guide for

# “More Than a Promise: The Covenant of Marriage”

Crosspointe Marriage | Class 2

*Vision: To build strong marriages with a foundation in Christ.*

*Mission: Mentor, encourage, and support marriages through Biblical teaching and guidance.*

## Ice Breakers

- **What You Heard:** What did you hear about marriage growing up—from family, friends, movies, or church? Looking back, which of those messages shaped how you actually live in your marriage today?
- **Promise vs. Covenant:** Think of a promise you have made and a covenant-like commitment you have lived through (a marriage, a friendship, a calling). How did the two feel different when life got hard?
- **Give or Get:** Be honest. In the last month, has your marriage felt more like a place where you are giving or more like a place where you are scoring what you are getting? What is that telling you?

## Key Scripture Passages

- **Genesis 2:20-25** — God identifies a need in Adam that nothing in creation can meet, puts Adam to sleep, and forms Eve from his side. The first marriage is established before God, sealed by sacrifice, and given the responsibility to become “one flesh.” Marriage begins as a covenant, not a contract.
- **Genesis 8:20** — After the flood, Noah builds an altar and offers burnt offerings. God responds by promising never again to destroy the earth by flood. The Noahic covenant is sealed by sacrifice.
- **Genesis 15:9-10; 22:2** — God establishes His covenant with Abraham by having animals cut in half, and later tests Abraham’s faith with the call to offer Isaac. A nation, a blessing, and global impact are all anchored in covenant sacrifice.
- **Exodus 24:5-8** — Moses ratifies the covenant at Sinai by sprinkling the blood of burnt offerings on the altar and on the people. “You will be My people” is sealed by blood.
- **2 Samuel 6:13** — As the ark is brought up to Jerusalem, sacrifices are offered in worship and the Davidic covenant—God’s promise of a lasting throne—is honored before the LORD.
- **Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:12** — Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant in His own blood. He enters the Most Holy Place “once for all” with His own blood, securing forgiveness, new life, and a restored relationship with God. Every covenant in the Bible points forward to this one.
- **Malachi 2:14** — God Himself is named as the witness between a husband and the wife of his youth. Marriage is explicitly called a covenant; God is not just aware of it—He stands as witness to it.
- **Matthew 19:6** — “What God has joined together, let not man separate.” Jesus teaches that God is actively involved in joining a marriage and that it is not meant to be easily broken.
- **Ephesians 5:25** — Husbands are commanded to love their wives “as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” Marriage is a living picture of Christ’s sacrificial, covenant love.
- **1 Corinthians 13:7** — Love “believes all things”—a covenant mind chooses trust over suspicion and conversation over conclusions.
- **James 2:13** — “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Covenant love leads with grace rather than self-made standards.

- **Romans 12:10** — “Be devoted to one another in love.” Covenant marriage embraces a spouse rather than merely tolerating them.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:11** — “Encourage one another and build each other up.” Effort and growth are honored, not just performance.
- **Acts 20:35** — “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Covenant love gives freely without keeping score.
- **Philippians 2:3–4** — In humility value others above yourselves—covenant love is other-focused, not self-focused.
- **1 Samuel 16:7** — “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Covenant love pursues the heart, not just the behavior.

## The Big Picture

Most of what we have heard about marriage from the world treats it like a legal contract: two people sign on, each performs, and if the terms break down, either side has the right to walk away. The Bible tells a very different story. From the very first marriage in Genesis 2, God presents marriage as a covenant—a sacred, binding commitment established before Him and with Him. There was a need in Adam that nothing in creation could meet; God Himself sacrificed part of Adam to make Eve; God brought her to him; and together they were given responsibility for the covenant. Marriage did not begin as a contract negotiated between equals. It began as a covenant cut by God.

Every covenant in Scripture follows the same pattern. With Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and finally with Jesus, something is always given—a sacrifice—to establish and confirm the relationship. Covenant is confirmed through sacrifice and responsibility. That is why a covenant is more than a promise. A promise often says, “I intend to.” A covenant says, “I am committed to—no matter what it costs me.” A promise can fade when feelings fade. A covenant remains when emotions fluctuate. A contract asks, “Am I getting what I deserve?” A covenant asks, “How can I love you well right now?”

The foundation you build your marriage on determines how it responds under pressure. A contract marriage is held together by performance: meeting expectations, fulfilling agreed roles, protecting personal interests, keeping score, and reserving the right to exit. A covenant marriage is held together by character: commitment, faithfulness, sacrifice and service, grace, perseverance, and unity. The remarkable thing about God’s design is that the very responsibilities He asks of a covenant marriage are also the blessings He gives back to it. You get what you give. Strong marriages are built when two people stop asking, “What am I getting?” and start asking, “What am I giving?”

## Group Discussion Questions

- What did you hear about marriage growing up that you now realize was more contract than covenant? Where is that thinking still showing up in how you respond to your spouse?
- Genesis 2:20–25 shows a need only God could meet, a sacrifice only God could make, and a responsibility only the couple could carry. Which of those three—the need, the sacrifice, or the responsibility—is hardest for you to keep in view in your own marriage right now?
- Every covenant in the Bible was sealed by sacrifice. What is something you are currently being asked to sacrifice in your marriage—time, comfort, preferences, control, being right? How are you responding to that ask?

- Of the six covenant responsibilities—commitment, faithfulness, sacrifice and service, grace, perseverance, and unity—which one is strongest in your marriage right now? Which one is weakest, and what is one small step toward growing it?
- Where do you most often slip into a contract mindset (meeting expectations, keeping score, conditional commitment, looking for the exit)? What triggers it, and what would a covenant response look like in that exact moment?
- A covenant says, “I will, even if you don’t.” Where in your marriage is God currently inviting you to keep loving even though it is not being returned the way you hoped?
- If your spouse listened in on your inner monologue this week, would they hear more of “What am I getting?” or “What am I giving?” What would need to shift to change the answer?

## Closing Challenge

- Most of us had a “covenant” wedding ceremony, but if we are honest, we tend to live more of a “contract” marriage. Sit down with your spouse and answer one question out loud together: “Are we operating as a covenant or as a contract?” Don’t debate the answer—name it honestly. Then choose one covenant responsibility (commitment, faithfulness, sacrifice and service, grace, perseverance, or unity) to lean into.
- Identify one place where you have been keeping score. Stop. Out loud, release it before God and tell your spouse, “I am not going to keep score on this anymore.”
- Replace one default phrase. Instead of “I will if you will,” practice saying, “I will, even if you don’t.” Watch what changes in the atmosphere of your home.
- Pick one sacrifice God is asking you to make for your spouse right now—something costly, not just convenient—and offer it without announcement and without expecting anything in return.
- Pray together once, out loud, asking God to help you see your marriage the way He sees it: a covenant He witnessed, joined, and intends to sustain.

## Personal Action Steps

- Read Genesis 2:20-25 and Malachi 2:14 slowly. Write down, in your own words, what it means that God Himself is the witness of your marriage covenant.
- Identify the one contract mindset that shows up most in you—legalism, suspicion, mere tolerance, performance scoring, give-to-get, self-focus, or behavior-only love. Name it before God and ask Him to begin replacing it with the covenant response.
- Choose one of the six covenant responsibilities to practice this week. Define one concrete action that proves it (e.g., for sacrifice, give up something you wanted; for grace, refuse to bring up a past failure).
- Take one running tally you have been keeping against your spouse—something they owe you, something they failed at, something you have been waiting for them to fix—and tear it up before God in prayer.
- Practice covenant language this week. Catch yourself before you speak and ask, “Am I about to respond like a contract or like a covenant?” Adjust before you open your mouth.
- Write out your own short “covenant vow” in one sentence (for example, “I will lead with grace, not judgment”) and place it somewhere you both will see it.
- Pray for your spouse by name every day. Don’t pray about them—pray for them. Ask God to do in their heart what only He can do, and to do the same in yours.

## Memory Verse

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” — Genesis 2:24 (NKJV)*

## Main Themes

### Theme 1: Covenant vs. Contract — A Different Kind of Commitment

The Bible does not present marriage as a legal contract between two people, as the world would tell you, but as a covenant established before God. A contract is a conditional agreement between two parties based on mutual benefit and performance: meeting expectations, fulfilling agreed roles, performance-based effort, protecting personal interests, keeping score, conditional commitment, accountability without much forgiveness, and a defined exit option. A covenant is a binding, relational commitment that is not dependent on performance but on promise. It is unconditional, sacrificial, God-centered, designed to last, and concerned with the heart. A contract says, “I will as long as you do.” A covenant says, “I will, even if you don’t.” A contract protects rights; a covenant gives itself away. A contract keeps score; a covenant stays committed. A promise can fade when feelings fade. A covenant carries weight that holds steady even in hardship.

### Personal Reflection

- When you said “I do,” were you stepping into a contract or a covenant in your own heart? How would you answer that question honestly today?
- Where in your marriage right now is the language of contract (“if you will, I will”) quietly setting the rules?
- What would change in this next week if you decided, before God, that your marriage is a covenant—regardless of what your spouse does?

### Theme 2: Cut by Sacrifice — Every Covenant Requires Something Given

In the Bible, a covenant represents a sacred, binding agreement between God and humanity, and the Old Testament Hebrew word implies “cutting” a deal—often sealed by sacrifice. Noah offers burnt offerings after the flood. Abraham cuts animals in half. Moses sprinkles blood on the altar and the people. David offers sacrifices in worship as God’s promise of a lasting throne is established. Jesus gives His own life and blood as the final sacrifice of the New Covenant. Every covenant in the Bible is connected to sacrifice—something is given to establish and confirm the relationship. Marriage is no different. The very first marriage in Genesis 2 was cut by sacrifice: God identified a need only He could meet, He put Adam to sleep, He took from Adam to make Eve, and He gave the couple responsibility for the covenant. Covenant is confirmed through sacrifice and responsibility. If nothing is being given—time, comfort, preferences, the right to be right—the relationship is operating like a contract, not a covenant.

### Personal Reflection

- What has God already sacrificed to establish your marriage that you may be taking for granted?
- What is the sacrifice God is asking you to make for your spouse in this season—and what has been your honest response so far?

- Where do you secretly hope that someone else's sacrifice (your spouse's, your pastor's, your parents') will be enough so you don't have to give anything yourself?

### Theme 3: The Six Responsibilities of a Covenant Marriage

When God established the first marriage, He gave Adam and Eve responsibilities for the covenant. Six of those responsibilities describe what covenant love actually looks like in everyday marriage. **Commitment** is choosing to stay and follow through, even when it is hard or feelings change. **Faithfulness** is being consistent, loyal, and dependable over time. **Sacrifice and service** is putting your spouse's needs ahead of your own and choosing to give, not just take. **Grace** is showing patience and forgiveness when your spouse makes mistakes. **Perseverance** is continuing to work through challenges instead of giving up. **Unity** is working together as one, not against each other—valuing “us” over “me.” The remarkable thing about God's design is that these are not just duties placed on the marriage; they are also the blessings God gives back to a marriage when it is done His way. You get what you give.

#### Personal Reflection

- Which of the six responsibilities is most alive in your marriage today? Which one have you been quietly avoiding?
- Where have you experienced the truth that “you get what you give”—either in the positive or the negative—in your marriage?
- If you committed to grow in just one of these responsibilities this week, which would it be, and what is the very first action that would prove it?

### Theme 4: The Contract Mindset That Quietly Erodes Love

The world wants you to think that marriage is just a contract that can be dissolved when conditions are not met. The responsibilities of a contract marriage sound reasonable on the surface—meeting expectations, fulfilling agreed roles, performance-based effort, protecting personal interests, keeping score, conditional commitment, accountability, and a defined exit option. But the result is that the responsibilities of a contract marriage depend on performance and meeting expectations—when one side stops, the commitment weakens. You give based on what you get. The danger is not that a contract mindset is dramatic; it is that it is quiet. It shows up as monitoring your spouse's behavior, assuming the worst when something feels off, merely tolerating instead of embracing, evaluating performance instead of recognizing effort, giving only when you feel appreciated, prioritizing your own comfort, and focusing on behavior while ignoring the heart. Left unchecked, a contract mindset slowly trades love for transaction.

#### Personal Reflection

- Which contract responsibility do you most often default to: meeting expectations, scoring performance, protecting personal interests, keeping score, or holding the exit door open?
- Where has “I will if you will” been the unspoken rule in your marriage, and what has it cost you?
- What would it look like, this week, to choose one covenant response in the exact place where you have been operating like a contract?

### Theme 5: Covenant in Practice — Seven Daily Contrasts

Covenant is not a feeling; it is a daily decision lived out in specific contrasts. Grace, not legalism: covenant love leads with grace and walks alongside a spouse who falls short, rather than monitoring behavior against

self-made standards (James 2:13). Believing the best, not assuming the worst: covenant love seeks understanding and chooses trust over suspicion when something feels off (1 Corinthians 13:7). Embracing, not tolerating: covenant love pursues a spouse and chooses affection, warmth, and connection rather than merely enduring them (Romans 12:10). Recognizing effort, not demanding performance: covenant love celebrates progress and encourages growth instead of grading results (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Giving, not getting: covenant love invests freely and remains faithful even when love is not returned right away (Acts 20:35). Other-focused, not self-focused: covenant love considers the spouse above oneself and makes decisions with “us” in mind (Philippians 2:3–4). Heart, not behavior: covenant love pursues what is underneath the surface—the thoughts, feelings, and struggles—because God Himself looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). These are the everyday vows of a covenant marriage.

### **Personal Reflection**

- Of the seven contrasts (grace vs. legalism, believing the best vs. assuming the worst, embracing vs. tolerating, recognizing effort vs. performance, giving vs. getting, other-focused vs. self-focused, heart vs. behavior), which contract mindset shows up most often in you?
- Which covenant response will you intentionally choose in its place, and what is the first concrete moment you will get to practice it?
- What would it mean for your spouse to experience that one covenant response from you consistently for the next thirty days?

### **The Big Idea**

Marriage is not just a promise—it is a covenant. A covenant is not sustained by feelings, but by commitment, sacrifice, and faithfulness. When you live out covenant responsibilities, you do not lose—you gain.

#### **Strong marriages are built when:**

- Marriage is treated as a covenant before God, not a contract between two people.
- Sacrifice is given freely, because covenant is always confirmed by something offered.
- Commitment, faithfulness, sacrifice, grace, perseverance, and unity are practiced as both responsibility and blessing.
- Each spouse stops asking, “What am I getting?” and starts asking, “What am I giving?”

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