

A Detour from God's Plan

PRINCIPLE ONE: *We battle the **curse of seeking to control and dominate others** in all our relationships.*

Question: How would things have to be different in your family for you to become a happy person?

Those who take that question seriously will spend time writing a manifesto describing how others would need to be different. But what if the question were: "How are you going to be a happy person even if the other person does not change?" What if the other person doesn't become the person you want them to be? Is it possible for you to be a happy person within your family with no changes taking place?

List-keeping among Christians is loaded with very right-sounding spiritual tasks. "I want him to pray with me." "She should submit to me when I make a decision and stop making 'helpful suggestions.'" "He should . . ." "She should . . ." In striving to make their homes happier and better places, they have turned them into hellish places where people sense they can never measure up. The place that is to be a blessing begins to feel like a curse. God never intended our marriages and our homes to be this way. He had a sweeter plan. We need to examine God's original plan for our intimate relationships.

GOD'S PLAN: Genesis 1–3.

Genesis 1:26–28 tells of God's creation of humankind in His own likeness: It took both male and female in order to truly represent the likeness of God. (This is reiterated in Genesis 5.) The "man" was in charge, but the man to whom responsibility was given—to be fruitful, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over every living thing—**was both male and female**. So, this is the first aspect of God's original plan for marriage: for males and females to be **co-rulers, co-subduers**.

God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him*" (Genesis 2:18). It does not say that God gave the man an assistant to order around. Beasts of the earth were to be ruled over—but this helper had to be "suitable" for man; "corresponding to him" in partnership.

God caused Adam to fall asleep and then God "*fashioned*" Eve (2:22). God created Eve. The language conveys something carefully and intentionally arranged on the part of God. Adam was formed, but Eve was fashioned—suitable, corresponding to. Pay close attention to Adam's first response when he awoke and saw Eve: "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*" (v. 23). He did not say, "Great, now I have someone to get my stuff for me, do the chores I don't feel like doing, and cater to my every need." And the Word of God goes on: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one" (v. 24). *A couple enters into the process of becoming one*, not "subduing" or "ruling over" one another. The plan for marriage is a dependence upon God; two becoming one flesh, co-ruling, a relationship in the image of God. How did we get so far off the mark?

GOD'S PLAN GETS SIDETRACKED: In one nightmarish moment everything for Adam, Eve, and the rest of humankind changed. Once they were dependent upon and in communion with God: **Then came rebellion, shame, and hiding**. What had been "one flesh" changed into disunity and blaming.

DISTORTED RELATIONSHIPS: After the fall, we see how drastically things changed. Adam and Eve became afraid of God and wanted to hide from Him. In relationship to themselves as individuals, they carried shame. And in relationship to each other, they began to blame and condemn. But there is an even more serious ramification affecting male/female relationships. In Genesis 3, we find what is

traditionally called the curse. In this passage, God said to the woman, “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*” (v. 16). First came the impulse to blame. Then God simply revealed the **self-centered core that** began to motivate each of them: The woman would continue to try to draw life and nurturing from a man who was not capable of filling these deep needs—never was and never will be. And the man would be forever trying to rule over the woman, either aggressively or passively trying to keep her quiet about his inadequacy to fill her needs. Each demands fulfillment from the other.

THE CURSE: What we see in Adam and Eve—and every fallen man and woman—is the curse. It is not God’s plan. His intent was that we rule together, dependent upon Him, mirroring His triune image in the way we relate in love to each other. This is not at all what the relationships look like in Genesis 3. When God said, “Your desire will be for your husband,” the phrase He used is the same one He employed in warning Cain about the ravages of jealousy and rebellion. In **Genesis 4:7** God said, “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” **Sin’s desire is destructive, dominating, and usurping.** Likewise, under the curse, the man would desire to “rule over” the woman. Sin would make the man tend to be harsh, despotic, and tyrannical in his leadership. The resulting relationship is one where we see two people who, because of their struggling, are both over someone and under someone. Once they lock themselves in a battle for control, they are caught in a hellish trap. This is the curse in operation.

CURSE-FULL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN: Illustration from Jeff VanVonderen: “Hello,” said the voice on the phone, “this is Dean Johnson from the college. It seems we’re having another problem with Steve. Can you and your husband find a time when we can meet?” This was the fourth such call that Chad and Fran had received. They felt confused and tired. As I looked at them, sitting with their son Steve in my office, I noticed that this couple looked a tad angry as well. The dean of the Christian college their son was attending had called to tell them Steve was caught drinking alcohol in his dorm room. As a result, Steve was suspended. For years Chad and Fran had tried every way they knew to stop their son’s drinking. But Steve insisted on breaking the rules set forth by the college and by his own family. His folks were understandably tired—but evidently not tired enough. “You are going to stop acting this way!” Chad shouted, his voice seething with rage and hurt. “I don’t have to listen to you!” Steve shot back. “Oh no? Well, I’m going to make you stop drinking if it’s the last thing I do,” Chad threatened. “You are embarrassing me, and you’re hurting your mother.” “You can’t order me around anymore,” Steve taunted. Can you see it? **Here are two people attempting to dominate the other.**

OUR RESPONSE TO THE CURSE: There are thousands of sermons, hundreds of books, and scores of seminars designed to help Christians rid themselves of the curse, as if it were a scab that could be picked off the surface of the skin. I cannot make this point strongly enough: **It is not our job as Christians to carry out the curse.** God has given us a new plan. That plan, which is meant to set us free, is not powered by a “more spiritualized” means of dominating: That is, only splashing white paint over an old and deadly spirit of legalism. God’s plan is powered by grace—to be transformed from the inside out!

Discussion Questions: **1.** Have you ever considered how you will be a happy person even if your spouse never changes? What are some factors that determine happiness for you? **2.** Why do you think many couples think their happiness depends on how their spouse acts or reacts? **3.** What do you think about the plan that God wants us to get our happiness primarily from Him? **4.** How do we tend to live our lives under “the curse” rather than according to God’s plan? What does that look like in your family? **5.** What is the reason why we usually want to control the actions of others, especially family members?