



## The Marriage Enhancement Project (MEP): OVERVIEW

### -Foundational Questions & Principles

**Marriage is the Most Important Relationship You can Know:** Marriage is the most important relationship you can know on earth, if only second to your relationship with Jesus Christ. Your identity as a husband or wife gets to the very core of who you are, even to the core of your identity in Christ. Consider that the Scriptures say that a man and woman become one flesh (Genesis 2, Matthew 19). We are so inextricably united with our spouse, that in all facets of life and living we live as a husband or a wife. Said another way, all of your life, in every respect, is rooted and bound up in your relationship with your spouse. Consider how Ephesians 5 associates the marriage relationship to your relationship to Jesus. To be rightly surrendered to and empowered by God, one must be rightly surrendered to and empowered in and by his or her relationship with a spouse. Said another way, God draws us nearer to Himself (matures us in Him) in and through our spouse, both in and through their strengths, and even in and through their weaknesses. We are designed to have unity, oneness, and intimacy— *with* our spouses— *with* God— *through* our marriages. This truth is profound and pointed— you cannot (wholly or rightly) separate your relationship with your husband or wife from your relationship with God.

**When Your Marriage isn't Right then Nothing Else is Right.** This great indelible truth of our *oneness* with our spouse is precisely why our marriages matter so much—and why brokenness in marriage is so highly consequential. When things aren't right in our marriages, then nothing else in life is really right, no matter how well things may be otherwise. This is true when marriage is even mildly tense or strained. This is most powerfully felt when the marriage is deeply broken. When marriage is devastated (even just hurting), the rest of life is debilitated if not devastated.

Does this ring true in your experience? Do you recognize how significant, powerful, consequential your relationship with your spouse is to the rest of your life? When you are in disharmony or conflict with your spouse, life is out of sync. When your marriage is falling apart, the rest of life is unraveling too. This is true experientially because of the *oneness* we share with our spouses, even the *oneness* we share with our spouses in our relationship with God Himself.

**How Do We Heal a Broken Marriage?** The pain, grief, and confusion in a broken marriage can be overwhelming. It pushes us to the very end of our own resources of wisdom and energy. So, all this pain, grief and confusion we experience beg the questions: How do we navigate it? How do we assuage it? How do we resolve it? If nothing matters more than our marriages—and our marriages are the source of pain, grief and confusion—how do we experience God’s intent—indeed how do we experience God Himself—even in the midst of a broken marriage? How do we save our marriage?

**Three Foundational Principles:** There are three foundational principles toward answering these questions:

1. The only hope for reconciliation, restoration, redemption is the hope of the Gospel—Jesus is the answer, to be sure. But intuition and experience demonstrates the application of this principle in the hardship of marriage is not simple or easy. *It takes a thoughtful, careful, deliberate, sophisticated understanding and application of the Gospel to experience reconciliation, restoration, and redemption of a broken marriage.*
2. The path toward marriage recovery is hard, challenging, perplexing and exhausting. We come quickly to the end of ourselves. There will be times of resolve, progress, and hope. There also will be times when we capitulate, get stuck, regress, even give up. *Perseverance through this difficult course of recovery requires a humble, contrite, aware, informed, determined, and resolved commitment to the process.*
3. The last of the Foundational Principles builds on the first two. First, it takes a sophisticated understanding and application of the gospel to help heal a broken marriage. Second, the work can bring a couple to the end of themselves. Therefore outside resource and help is needed. We have learned that we can lean on, even borrow the faith and will of other likeminded believers. We can’t do it alone; the insight, support, and encouragement of others are imperative. *It takes a community of faith to bring reconciliation, restoration, and redemption to a broken marriage.*

**What does growth and maturity in marriage look like?** God designed marriage to be a life-long experience—till death do us part. Growth and maturity in a healthy marriage comes in the duration of time. The process of marriage recovery indeed takes time. We don't get fixed by a few good steps; it is a journey, even a strenuous journey. So we ask the questions: What does growth and maturity in marriage recovery look like? What does progress look like? What is the measure of success in marriage recovery?

*Growth and maturity in marriage begins and ends with an ever-deepening understanding of God's purpose for marriage. The purpose of marriage is to make us godly—to grow us and mature us in Him and His ways.* Blessing, joy and happiness in marriage is purposed to delight us in Him. Marriage is designed to be a celebration and gratitude for His kindness and generosity. It should be said that delighting in Him is also to delight in our spouse, who is an instrument of that joy. Trials, hardship and suffering is purposed to draw us toward Him. It allows for there be an increase of dependence and trust in His good, purposeful sovereignty and faithfulness. This especially comes into view in the midst of a broken marriage. Dependence and trust in God's sovereignty and faithfulness in marriage is in full view (not in spite of) of our spouse's deficiencies and failures. God purposes to grow us in Him both in and through our spouse's strengths and even in and through our spouse's weakness and failures. The hard work of marriage recovery is only made worth it when we understand this paradigm: God's purpose of marriage, even in a broken marriage, is to mature us in Him and His ways.

Growth and maturity, progress, success in marriage, is measured by an ever deepening understanding of this paradigm. We may evaluate this progress in several ways:

1. **Articulate it**— Can you articulate this paradigm of God's purpose for your marriage? Can you personalize it? Are you able to speak of it and call it out in the context of your own marriage? Can you acknowledge the ways God aims toward your own growth and maturity in Him through both the strengths and weaknesses of you and your spouse?
2. **Mean it**— Can you embrace and surrender to the ways God aims to grow you and mature you in Him through both the strengths and weaknesses of you and your spouse? Can you acknowledge and confront the ways you think and feel contrary to the paradigm? Is your mind and heart informed and constrained by this God's purpose for you in your marriage. Are you honest about it? Do you believe it? Are you convinced of it? Do you mean it?

3. ***Demonstrate it***— Do your relational intentions, decisions, choices, and actions flow from your understanding of this God’s purpose for your growth in Him through your marriage? Do you make deliberate relationship choices in light of it? Are you able to retract yourself from choices to the contrary? Do you have integrity in it? Can you demonstrate it?
4. ***Skills to navigate it***— We are ever on the journey to maturity. There will be strides forward and there will be steps back. Are skills in pursuit or in place to pull through set-backs and build upon momentum? Are we ever growing in the skills to navigate the challenging purposes of His growing us through both the strengths and weakness of ourselves and our spouses? Developing skills to navigate the complexities of meaning it and demonstrating it is a measure of progress.
5. ***Ability to collaborate relationally with others***—This is all too much for one person; keeping our wits about us, remaining convinced, thinking, feeling and doing the right thing with stability and consistency. We can’t do it alone. We weren’t meant to do it alone. We can only do it with God’s help and with the help of God’s people. Are supportive people who understand the process in place and on call to help? It is tempting to go it alone, to isolate, and to hide. Are you quick to turn to other godly people for perspective, support, and encouragement? Are you trusting and surrendered to godly guidance and influence? The ability to collaborate relationally with other is a mark of growth and maturity.

## **- Format & Structure**

The Marriage Enrichment Project (MEP) is a strategic program set to work toward marriage recovery with the above ideas clearly in focus (God’s purpose for marriage, and the three foundational principles, and the way to evaluate progress). The following highlight certain aspects of the MEP participants & Structure:

- The Couple—The MEP couple have assented and agreed together of the ideas and purposes set forth and are committed to the process.
- The MEP Team—A team of supportive couples have assented and agreed together to encourage and support the couple through the process.
  - Regular meetings will be scheduled for the MEP Team
  - MEP Team members will be connected to the same gender participant
- The MEP Counselor—The MEP Counselor leads the couple and the team through the process.
  - Regular individual sessions will be scheduled.
  - Regular couple sessions will be scheduled.

- The Church—The Church to which the couple belongs provides spiritual oversight and covering for the couple during the MEP process. Every effort will be made to keep the Church apprised and involved in the MEP.
- The MEP Personalized Strategy---Each MEP will have strategies and assignments and exercises tailored especially to meet the particular circumstances and needs of the MEP couple.
- The Assignments. Here is a brief glimpse of the scope of work that will be accomplished during the MEP:
  - The Amends List: *Each sin in marriage is both born out of and is a manifestation of a failure to cherish one's spouse; which is a failure to cherish Christ.*
  - Conceptualizing, apprehending & pursuing: Gospel Centered Marriage Relationship: Faith & Worship.
  - The Integrity Inventory: This is confession (written).
  - The Integrity Presentation: This is confession (spoken/witnessed).
  - The Summation Exercise: *What went wrong? What is the solution? What does the future hold? This assignment will help identify markers revealing when the couple has gone off track. It will also help them to know what to do in order to find remedy.*
  - The Sobriety Symbol: Understanding and expressing the value of sobriety.
  - The Blessing.
  - Life Long Mission Vision/Statements: *Man as Husband, Father and Vocation, Woman as Wife, Mother and Legacy.*
  - Development of a Family Constitution.
  - Restoration of Broken Relationships.
  - Understanding Hope & Motivation.
  - Movement into Forgiveness.
  - Understanding Grief as an act of Worship
  - Living With the Reality of Deficiencies.
  - Community, Shared Life & Intimacy.
  - The Pool of Holy Matrimony.
  - Father, Mother, Parenthood.
  - Building Trust.
  - Sex: Realizing Potential.
  - Dance/Fun/Play & Recreation.
  - Finance.
  - Physical Health & Responsibility
    - Diet, Exercise, Rest
  - Boundaries (behavioral, including controlled separation).
  - Other Projects & Exercises.
  - Meetings/gatherings: *to occur with MEP team, as well as with the broader community of faith or the church when needed or applicable.*
  - Accountability.
  - Evaluation, legacy and Closure.
  - Progression through Phases.
  - Tracking of Progress
    - Relapse/regression/withdrawal
    - Completed assignments/milestones
  - Commencement
  - Celebration

## **-COSTS**

There is a \$1200 MEP initiation fee outside of counseling fees. This fee may be adapted and reconsidered upon request. The goal of the ministry is to encourage and walk alongside couples in the pursuit of restoration. We will be devout in our efforts to overcome obstacles that may prevent this good work from taking place.

In addition to the initiation fee, The One on One counseling Fee is \$130 per 50-85 minute sessions. Again, the ministry will work to overcome the obstacle of finance. It is encouraged that both spouses meet with their counselor at least one time per week at the outset of the MEP. It is also encouraged that there be an additional joint counseling session weekly. These recommendations may vary based on the needs and situation of each case.

For the MEP Corporate meetings, it may be necessary for the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment Counselor to travel to couples working the MEP in other states or some distances away. In such cases Travel costs are the responsibility of the MEP Couple.

The intensive counseling will range from \$1200 for 2-day intensive to up to \$2800 for a five day intensive. Scholarships may be requested and will be granted based on available funding and client need. The intensive is highly recommended, but absolutely necessary to proceed with the MEP.

Nathan C. Bell is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. Therefore some insurance companies cover many of his services. The Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment does not file directly with insurance companies. Instead, we will provide necessary documentation for you to submit to your insurance provider to seek possible reimbursement.

The Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment is in good standing with many local churches. Financial assistance from your local church may be available. Be sure to ask us about it. If we do not already know your pastor, we want to get to know him.

### **Ongoing Care!**

Within the structure established in the MEP; both parties will continue to meet once a week separately with their counselor at Live the Life. At the right time joint council will begin and will occur on a regular basis. This joint council will proceed with clear objectives and purposes. The joint council will continue until restoration has been realized and after – according to the preferences of all involved.