



**Center For Marriage
& Family Enrichment**
a ministry of Fulfilling Endeavors

Marriage Enhancement Project Foundational Principles Essentials & Overview,

Foundational Principles: Hope, Trust & Godliness

-Hope

Thank you for your interest in *Marriage Enhancement Project* (as it is offered through the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment). The fact that you are reading this document means that there is hope for you to experience the fulfillment that God originally intended when He lead and prompted you to your original marriage vows. The word *hope* in this context is used strategically and purposefully.

There are two contexts within which to consider the *hope* that exists in your circumstances. First, the good news is that in the circumstances surrounding your marriage, *hope* genuinely has merit. *Hope* does not rest in human achievement but in God's character. God has revealed His character through His word, His people, and His action. He has demonstrated that He is a restoring God (Psalm 23); He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16); that it is not good for man (or woman) to be alone (Genesis 2:18); that He loves you and wants your absolute best (John 3:16 & Romans 8:28); that He will take care of you (Matthew 6:26) and that He will fulfill you (Psalm 57:2). These truths warrant *hope* for you, your circumstances and your spouse. It is invigorating to consider the potential of God's restorative power in your life and the life of your marriage.

The second context within which to consider *hope* is more sobering. The word *hope* is essentially anticipatory. Its object is always something that is not yet attained. One *hopes* for what one presently *does not* have. You probably would not be reading this document if you were not discouraged (or worse) about the state and future state of your marriage. It is with this danger and discouragement in mind that the detailed framework of the *Marriage Enhancement Project* was created. It is our goal to help you take every vital step and precaution necessary to realize the object of the *hope* in your circumstances.

It is apparent that the value of marriage is decreasing in our culture. More and more marriages are dissolving. The fact that you are considering these words demonstrates that you are resisting, and perhaps might work your way into bucking, this discouraging trend. Should you choose to proceed with the MEP, you will be going against the ebb and flow of the culture. With this thought in mind, it can be stated that though the MEP is all about you and your marriage, it also about you and your place in God's work and outreach to the world. Your battle is about you, but it is also a battle against the work of the enemy and the forces of evil in this world. Your decision to resist the flow of the world warrants respect. The *Marriage Enhancement Project* was created and motivated out of this respect. The aim of the program is to empower you to realize and achieve what many others miss: the fulfillment God intended for the union in Holy Matrimony.

Holy Matrimony is fulfilling and rewarding partly because of how difficult and dangerous it is. The abounding rewards that are found in marriage are essentially linked to the decision of one human being to value, to love, honor and cherish another. As such, the personal consent (decision) of both parties is inherently necessary to the experience of fulfillment in holy matrimony. Both are given the power to decide whether or not to give of themselves (the terms "giving of themselves", includes their affection, fidelity, attention, etc.) to another. When this consent is offered in a marriage union, it is what postures the marriage to experience fulfillment. More specifically, when consent is offered it builds trust.

-Trust

Trust exists on both an emotional and a behavioral level. Emotionally, trust is essentially *the confidence one has in another's character and the decisions that flow out of that character*. Trust can be understood as an emotion: "I feel trusting" or "I trust..."

On a behavioral level trust exists in the decision to trust; to conclude that a quality or state of character exists in another on the basis of limited or even contrary information. Trust in this context is a behavior, conceptualized in the phrase: "I choose to trust".

-Godliness

The term Godliness is another term that can be framed in two ways. A person can be both "Godly" in the makeup of their character. A person can also make Godly choices. These two forms, or manifestations, of Godliness are connected and feed each other. The Godlier one is, the more Godly choices they will make. This is also true in reverse, the more Godly choices one makes, the more Godly they will become.

-Trust & Godliness

The trust that exists in one person for another person is linked to Godliness. This is because trust is based on one's perception of another's quality of character and the decisions that flow out of that character. Godliness is therefore vital to the existence of trust. The more Godly a person *is*, the more they will be trusted (and the more that trust placed in them will be warranted). Trust, in the context of the ministry of the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment, and therefore the MEP, is defined as: *The confidence one person has or places in another's Godliness*. Since trust is clearly connected to the health and progress of an intimate relationship, it is clear that Godliness is also. Trust and Godliness are both essential to the restoration process in a marriage.

Intimacy & Fulfillment Found in the Gospel

-Intimacy

It is important to take this one step further. The primary reason that trust (and therefore Godliness) is so vital to a marriage is because *intimacy* is predicated by trust. True intimacy can only be had when true trust exists (and to the extent that it exists). Intimacy is defined as a connection between two people, characterized as "knowing" and "being known".

This *intimate connection* is vital to a marriage because it is where the husband and wife tap into the purpose of their union. The husband and wife are made by God to truly, *intimately, connect* (to know and be known by each other) and share themselves. In sharing themselves they are (even without knowing it) sharing what God has given them to share with one another. Amazingly, they are giving to each other what God has designed for them to give to the other. They are simultaneously getting and sharing God (or said another way, they are collaboratively worshiping God), which is the entire point of the marriage. To get closer to, to abide with, to move deeper into, and to celebrate God with your spouse is marriage's purpose (Matthew 19:5).

-Fulfillment in Marriage

When the purpose of anything is accomplished, it is fulfilled. Therefore the only way to experience true fulfillment in a marriage is to accomplish its purpose. More appropriately and accurately, this can be put on a continuum. To the extent that a couple can and does accomplish the purposes of marriage, it is to that extent that they experience fulfillment. In the end, fulfillment in marriage is realized when the two spouses become one; when they successfully unify and connect. This connection only occurs when intimacy exists. Remember, intimacy is based on trust, which is based on Godliness.

Do you trust the Godliness and subsequent decisions that flow out of that character of your spouse? On what evidence do you base your conclusions? Is it wise to trust your spouse? When was the last time you intimately connected with your spouse? Physically? Emotionally? Spiritually? Is s/he deciding to give of him/herself (or *connect*) to you? Are you giving yourself to him/her? Are you sure? Most likely the answers to these questions range from: "Heck no!" to "I do not know". It is rare to feel confident and trusting during the initial stages of a MEP. This is why it is vital to find a stable focus upon which to base your trust. The MEP has its foundation of trust in the goodness of God and His character (Mark 10:18).

Risks of Mutual Consent, with Only One Guarantee

-Mutual Consent

The rewards of marriage are therefore greatly impacted by the *mutual consent* of both parties to trust the other. It is precisely this fact that makes the lack of mutual consent to trust, or “broken trust,” so dangerous and potentially painful. If the decision to trust is not offered consistently *by both parties*, then the experience of fulfillment in holy matrimony is stifled and destroyed.

-Only One Guarantee

The fact that the best rewards of marriage depend largely on mutual consent in a marriage begs the question: What if mutual consent does not exist or cannot be found? The great comforting answer is that there is still one assured guarantee: God is good and He will take care of you (1 Timothy 6:17). This is the promise He offers to all of His people (Romans 8:28) and it is most assuredly cherished as it applies to you and your circumstances. God is good. Unfortunately His people, in contrast, demonstrate that they are not good. His people make bad decisions which impact and complicate their marriages. This process you are beginning is not immune to your bad decisions or those of your spouse.

Your counselor at the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment is devoted to working the MEP to its best possible outcome for you and your spouse. In the end, the successful attainment of that outcome will rest in the *mutual consent to trust God and each other* – of you and your spouse. This can be said plainly: If you both decide to be successful in the attainment of your goals; you will be successful. If one of the two of you does not choose to cooperate, then mutual consent will not be realized. This fact then leads to a subsequent and yet equally valuable set of questions: What do you want? How badly do you want it? Why do you want it? Do you know what your spouse wants? Do you know how badly s/he wants it? Do you know why they want it? Do you know how you will respond should you discover that your spouse does or does not want restoration? These questions illuminate the essential value of this conceptual foundation of the MEP.

The Goal is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings Fulfillment.

To set about resolving the crisis that exists in your marriage is to pursue the purpose of your marriage and to fulfill it. It is essential to define the goal as the fulfillment of the Gospel, apart from other terms such as “happy”, “close”, “fun”, etc. It is of course

perfectly legitimate to pursue happiness, closeness and fun as essential aspects of any marriage. However these are not the end that warrants the risks involved with the mutual consent to trust.

What the MEP is designed to pursue is the fulfillment found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ above all else. God is the only One that will fulfill (2 Thessalonians 1:11). The relationship sealed and defined through the covenant of Holy Matrimony is a means to experiencing the fulfillment found in God (Ephesians 5). God, His Word, His Spirit, His body is offered to His people in Love. God gives us the blessed union of Holy Matrimony to tangibly *know* and to *be known by* that love (Ephesians 5 & 1 John 4:8).

The very initial and pivotal step towards restoration in marriage is to frame the marriage appropriately, which is to frame it in truth. The word of God says that you shall know the truth and that the truth will set you free (John 8:32). It is helpful to associate the word truth, in the context of this discussion about marriage, with the person of Jesus. It has been stated and referred to often that Christ is the truth; that God is truth (John 3:21 & 33). This association is appropriate.

Essentially God is saying, "When you get into touch with Who I AM you will experience freedom". This implies that there is something essentially freeing, essentially good about Him. This is not just good news; it is liberating great news! This means that whatever is true about your circumstances; when you know Him; He will both present you with Himself and He becomes your end goal, your reward. He will set you free! Free from what? He will set you free from slavery to sin (John 8:34). Free from the hopelessness that is bound up in the devastating sinful cycle (2 Peter 3-10). Free from whatever may be distracting you from experiencing (from knowing) Him and His plan for you (Romans 8:35). This essentially entails a freedom from whatever may be hindering you from experiencing the fulfillment that you were hoping for when you stood before your spouse and made your vows. God is good and He wants you to know His goodness.

We at the Center for Marriage and Family Enrichment frame this encouragement from God as: *The truth will make us free to enjoy marriage; free to enjoy life; free to enjoy God through marriage and through life.*

-How do we get there?

How do you get there? How do you find God in the midst of your circumstances? God says that you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. Since it is truth that will bring freedom, then honesty, accepting truth, telling the truth, is the means to

accessing truth. Be honest and seek Him. It is really that simple. The difficulty is that it can often require humility, courage and faith to be honest. Moreover, it can require faith and perseverance to focus and listen to Him in the midst of hard circumstances. Consequently the simple decision to be honest seems at outset to be more complicated than it really is. But do not be fooled.

Painful Examples

-Quick Examples

Two quick examples help to make this clear. First consider the wife who has discerned for years that there is something wrong with her marriage. She sees anger in her husband and constantly senses that he is unsatisfied. In her mind she assumes the anger and dissatisfaction has everything to do with her. She concludes that either she is doing something wrong, saying something wrong, or is just plain selfish (too flawed). "There is something wrong with me!" is the message she reiterates time and time again whenever she senses the anger and dissatisfaction in her husband. Consider also that perhaps it is this very message that has hindered her from feeling loved by God. She thinks internally (perhaps subconsciously): "How could God love, cherish and honor a selfish, flawed woman like me?"

Suppose that miraculously this woman's husband reveals the secret porn addiction (i.e. the truth) he has been keeping from her for years and years. He confesses to her that two of the consequences of this addiction on him were feelings of anger and dissatisfaction. He says that for years he has been angry at himself for betraying her confidence. He shares that he has had and an overall feeling of dissatisfaction knowing that this behavior has been going on. He tells her how grieved he is for offending her especially because she is so gifted, generous, nurturing, and pleasant.

This wife, as traumatic as it may be to hear she has been betrayed, will be set free from the "there is something wrong with me" message that has been tearing her up. She hears her husband tell her that it both is not and has not, been her nor her character at the core of his struggle. Not only will she experience the liberation of burden she has been carrying throughout the life of the marriage; she will become increasingly open to what God may have to say to her. The major obstacle has been removed. "Perhaps," she thinks to herself, "God isn't disgusted by me after all".

The second example (and remember these are just examples provided with the hope of enriching insight) comes from the husband's side. Suppose the husband has kept the secret porn struggle a secret for so long because he knows rejection will come if he becomes honest. His internal message is: "I have got to keep up the front; I have got to keep the mess hidden... I will lose everything if I don't." He is sure that all he has in his life is dependent on his ability to be good – as opposed to who He (God) is. Due to his increasing despair and desperation he finally breaks and shares honestly with his wife. He just can't keep himself on the treadmill any longer.

When he does, he is surprised by her reaction. He can see that she is hurt by the betrayal. He also can see that there will be consequences to his actions. But he is somewhat surprised that he did not die. Moreover he can see that perhaps he will be forgiven by his wife. Most importantly he discovers that what he longs to know most is that he is forgiven by his God. The husband's choice to be real about his weakness, failure, rebellion and doubt, actually lead to a deeper awareness about how deep and real God's mercy is. The despair and desperation disappears because he knows that he has obeyed the Lord. He discovers that abiding with God, more than anything else, is what he was made for.

In the cases above two things are true: first, honesty was the only action that was taken. Second, honesty unlocked both individuals to hearing from and abiding more deeply with God.

-Pain

Unfortunately there is a misconception that can be drawn from a discussion of God's goodness and the examples given above. The freedom that comes from God's goodness does *not* amount to freedom from pain. When health (goodness) meets un-health, there is always pain. An example is the pain that comes from the cleansing of a wound.

When a wound is cleaned it hurts. This does not change the fact that it is good for the wound to be cleansed; it is a progression to health and resolve. The key here is to recognize that the cleansing is not the cause of the pain. The wound is the problem. The cleansing of the wound infiltrates and cleanses the body from the damage that has already been done. Therefore to know reality, to be honest and honor God, especially if reality includes the fact that there is a wound, is also to know pain. This pain does not mean the process is not good.

There are a couple of scriptural truths that bring comfort to one in the midst of pain:

1 Peter 5: 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Hebrews 12: 4In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

God exhorts His people to consider Him and His process when they experience pain. His Word reveals His compassion and points to the redemptive hope for fulfillment that He is bringing them to. He exhorts His people as a loving Father over His children. He essentially acknowledges the pain and fear; bringing meaning to it. This is the aim of the high cost you are paying through the pain of your circumstances. What a joy it is to consider that God can bring fulfilling meaning to the pain and comfort to the fear. He assures you that He is working in the midst of the process.

A Call for Action: Faith!

But God also exhorts His people to act (Ephesians 2:10). He presents truth and challenges them to engage the will through a step towards Him. He challenges His people to risk, to trust Him. The term we use for this process is faith.

-Faith

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is often misconstrued as belief. It is an error to conclude that faith and belief are synonymous. Faith is a combination of three components that build on one another. The first of the three components is knowledge of the truth. The second is a belief or trust of that knowledge. The third is action flowing out of the belief or trust of that knowledge. It is broken down as follows:

Faith =

1. Knowledge of Truth
2. Belief & Trust of the Knowledge
3. Action based on the belief & trust of the truth

Faith is the process wherein one engages their belief and knowledge of the truth through their actions. Faith is acting upon your beliefs. God brings His truth. He comforts His people in the pain that His truth brings. He then exhorts His people to pursue Him. He promises His people that when they do so they will be rewarded; they will be fulfilled; they will find meaning in their pain.

Ultimate Goal

Unity, intimacy, knowing and being known by God as we are unified, intimate, know and are known by our spouse, this is the goal of the MEP. God is good and He is the foundation upon which the MEP is built. In Him is trust established. This trust is based on the goodness of His character. Faith (action based on belief based on truth) takes on the form of honesty. Through the honesty of His people God brings truth to light. This truth is painful in that it reveals the depth of wounds and consequences of a legacy of broken decisions. The truth also brings comfort and meaning to the challenging circumstances His people often find themselves in.

Trust and truth have the potential to bring light to the character of the participants in the marriage. Trust in the marriage is then equipped to grow and is nurtured. Mutual consent to trust, it is hoped, begins to flow. Intimacy, or unity and fulfillment is experienced as a result of the mutual consent to trust. This is the ultimate goal of process and conceptual foundation in the *MEP*. It is a concept designed to be carried out in process. It will take time. How much time it takes will depend on numerous variables and is impossible to predict. The MEP program provides the conceptual foundation and framework; providing a template for you and your spouse to consider. It is done in the spirit of cooperation and in the same hope that God used to draw you to us; the hope that somehow He can work in your present circumstances.

Structural Framework: An Introduction to the Plan of Action

The process has already begun. Your incorporating these words into your thinking is a continuation of the process wherein God is revealing His truth to you. He is fostering your trust of Him right now. He is also inviting you to consider whether or not you will exercise your faith and act on what you are being told. Should you choose to move forward; you will experience pain and fear. Some may be deterred by this fact and yet truthfully, pain and fear will be experienced no matter what decision is made. The question ultimately is will your pain and fear have meaning and hope in it?

-Declining the MEP

Should either spouse choose not to pursue the MEP; then the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment will continue to offer marital or individual counsel to both participants. It is our hope that both parties will remain open to the possibility of pursuing an MEP at some point down the line.

-The Plan of Action

The MEP has four different components to it *in addition* to one on one counseling with a Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment counselor. Two of which are absolutely essential to the MEP. The other two are optional additions that provide greater strength and protection through a structure.

The Four Components are:

Essential to an MEP

1. The MEP - Marriage Interaction Structure

- a. A behavioral structure that guides the interaction between the spouses. The interaction would prohibit certain behavior and interaction between the spouses – and would require other types of interaction. The behavioral structure also has a predefined way of handling conflict and incorporating help from the MEP team (referenced below).
- b. Described in more detail in the MEP Contract.

2. The MEP Team Network Structure and Interaction

- a. In addition to the interaction structure, a team of people will be sought to support the married couple through the MEP process.
- b. A more detailed description is in the MEP Contract.

Optional additions

3. MEP Assignments

- a. The MEP Marriage Contract will provide an overview and structure for interaction between the couple on a grander scale. The process begins by using a template to work through how the structure should look. When a structure is agreed upon it becomes a contract.
- b. In the MEP Marriage Template/Contract both couples will observe a be assigned assignments that may include some of the following:
 - i. A Separation in some cases. The purpose of the separation is for sobering re-evaluation. During this time, both parties are strongly encouraged to evaluate their own conduct in the marriage. Both the husband and the wife are encouraged to consider the impact of their decisions and take personal responsibility.
 - ii. A Reintroduction/Amends: Both parties are encouraged to pursue honesty and exhorted to prepare for and then participate in a reintroduction. More details about this assignment are provided when assigned. For now it can be summed up as a very thorough amends.
 - iii. Other assignments may include topics having to do with sex, with grief, with Godly discipleship, etc.

4. The MEP Counseling Intensives

- a. As a springboard into the other components of the MEP listed above, an intensive 2-5 day one on one counseling program has been developed. The Intensive program is shaped according to the needs of each spouse.
- b. The Intensive counseling is designed to be offered for each spouse subsequent to and alongside one another. All will vary to fit each couple's needs.

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. This cost will vary on a sliding scale. 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.

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.

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 the Center for Marriage & Family Enrichment. At the right time joint counsel will begin and will occur on a regular basis. This joint council will proceed with clear objectives and purposes. The joint counsel will continue until restoration has been realized and after – according to the preferences of all involved.