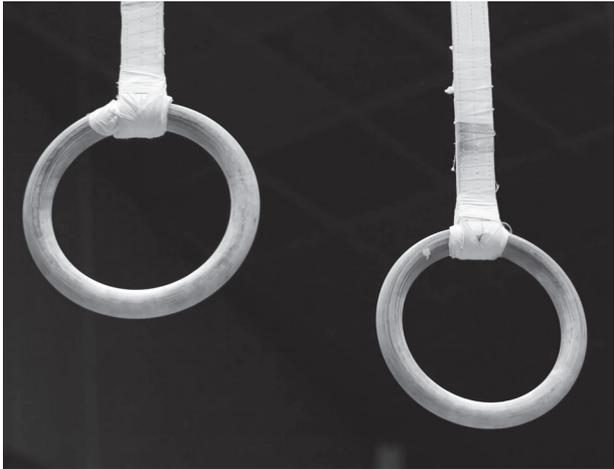


MARRIAGE – A BLESSED PROMISE

by Daniel F. Camp



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Introduction

One of the keys to building stronger churches is to build stronger families. Stronger families grow out of strong marriages.

This study will guide you through the main aspects of the marriage relationship with insight, vision, and humor. You will be directed time and again to God's Marriage Manual, the Bible, to discover marriage as God designed it. In the process of this study you will find the true blessing of marriage and experience the goodness of God.

About the Author

Dr. Daniel Camp and his wife Lisa have three children; two daughters and a son. After earning a B.A. degree from Lipscomb University, he served as youth and family minister in Portland, TN. He is currently serving as the Family Life Minister at the Smyrna Church of Christ in Smyrna, TN. In addition to a B.A., Dr. Camp earned a Master of Arts in Religion and a Master of Divinity degree from Lipscomb University and completed a Doctor of Ministry degree at Abilene Christian University, focusing on the theology and ecclesiology of marriage. He is the author of *The Marriage-Friendly Church* and *Marriage Ministry Team Workbook*. He is the co-director and co-founder of *Remembering Our First Love Marriage Ministries*, and *The Marriage Blog* (www.rememberingourfirstlove.blogspot.com) is his weekly posts for helping couples to have a better marriage. Dr. Camp has a passion for helping churches reclaim Christ-centered marriage as a powerful witness of the goodness of God to in our world.



Lesson 1

Is What You See Really What You Get?

Key Verse:

*We went to the land to which you sent us and,
oh! It does flow with milk and honey!*
(Numbers 13:27 - The Message)

WARM UP



Just about everyone has seen those cool optical illusion pictures that show one image when you look at it one way, but if you rotate the picture or readjust your focal point, a totally different picture becomes clear. Back in the 1990's the hidden image, Magic Eye 3-D posters were all the rage. At first glance, the posters are just a swirl of psychedelic colors, but if you stared deeply into the colors and allowed your eyes to become slightly unfocused, highly detailed 3-D shapes emerged. You might have seen anything from the Statue of Liberty to the space shuttle to a safari scene popping out at you when you least expected it. What is the most amazing optical illusion you've ever seen?

WORK OUT



Is what you see really what you get? I guess it depends on what you see. Numbers 13 in the Old Testament is not a biblical text that is normally used to talk about marriage, but there is a really significant application.

As chapter 13 opens, the Israelites have come to the border of the land God has promised to give them. God delivered them from their Egyptian slavery in a spectacularly powerful series of plagues upon the Egyptians, proving that He and He alone was God, and culminating in the Passover and the death of the Egyptians' firstborn. God then miraculously led His people through the middle of the Red Sea, took them to Mount Sinai to affirm them as His covenant people, and gave them the Law. And now, just a few weeks later they have moved from the lowest of the low to a nation ready to claim what is rightfully theirs.

As they prepared to enter the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to select twelve men, one from each tribe, to scout out the lay of the land before the Israelites proceeded into it. For forty days these twelve men moved throughout the Promised Land, observing and learning all they could. At the end of the forty days, and with a cluster of grapes so big it took two men to carry it, they returned to their camp to give their report to Moses and the rest of the Israelite nation. Here's what they had to say:

"We went to the land to which you sent us and, oh! It does flow with milk and honey! Just look at this fruit! The only thing is that the people who live there are fierce, their cities are huge and well-fortified. Worse yet, we saw descendants of the giant Anak. Amalekites are spread out in

the Negev; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites hold the hill country; and the Canaanites are established on the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan.”

Caleb interrupted, called for silence before Moses and said, “Let’s go up and take the land—now. We can do it.”

But the others said, “We can’t attack those people; they’re way stronger than we are.” They spread scary rumors among the People of Israel. They said, “We scouted out the land from one end to the other—it’s a land that swallows people whole. Everybody we saw was huge. Why, we even saw the Nephilim giants (the Anak giants come from the Nephilim). Alongside them we felt like grasshoppers. And they looked down on us as if we were grasshoppers” (Numbers 13:27-33, *The Message*).

Think about it. All twelve scouts saw the same land. All twelve agreed that it was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. They all saw the unbelievable goodness of the land, knowing it could provide amply for God’s people. Yet ten of the twelve said, “We can’t do it. This is an impossible task that will completely destroy us.” Only two said, “God is on our side. The land is already ours. We just have to go take it.” All twelve had the same set of facts, but they were operating from totally different viewpoints.

You see, whether you want it to happen or not, your perception will always become your reality. Once ten of the spies perceived themselves to be insignificant insects who were about to be crushed, that perception became an insurmountable reality for them. But for Joshua and Caleb, the power and the promise of God at work through them was their perception. So, they saw the land flowing with milk and honey that rightfully belonged to them as something they would possess, in spite of the giants that challenged them.

So the question for each one of us is, “What viewpoint do you bring to your marriage?” Do you see your marriage as a land flowing with milk and honey, a Promised Land that is a blessing from and blessed by God? Or do you see your marriage as a land filled with unbeatable “giants” that are out to destroy you and your mate?

Please understand that I am not naïve in asking this question. Just because you want to see a Promised Land filled with goodness, that doesn’t mean it’s going to automatically happen and that you will have a fairy tale marriage that never encounters any problems. Maintaining any relationship in a healthy and productive way is going to be a challenge. Because marriage is so intimate, it can be especially challenging. (If a marriage relationship doesn’t present any challenges, it is very likely that one partner is being repressed in some way.) But, we tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you consistently focus on the things that can disrupt and destroy your marriage—finances, personality differences, sexual issues, extended family, work schedules, children, or whatever else—then those things eventually will dominate and define your marriage. Your perspective will become your reality.

But you can also choose to see your marriage as a place that your love for God is lived out in your relationship with your spouse. You can focus on the promises of your covenant relationship, the times you laugh together and find joy in each other, the ways your spouse lovingly and selflessly serves you, and all the other good things within your marriage relationship—no matter how big or small. You can continually see marriage as a place of blessing and experiencing the goodness of God. Then that outlook will become your “default” view for your relationship and for your mate. When that becomes your default view, then even when tough times come, your marriage relationship becomes a safe harbor; a place of encouragement, forgiveness, and

reconciliation rather than a place of strife, anger, and mistrust. Your perception will become your reality.

So how do I know what my perception is? How do I assess my point of view? How do I know if I am being realistic about the challenges of a relationship or if I am just being negative? One of the surest ways to recognize the point of view you are bringing to your marriage is to listen to the way you talk to your spouse, and the way you talk about your marriage to others. If you regularly use large, encompassing words in a negative sense, there is a good chance you might want to honestly assess what you are allowing to shape your view of your marriage.

“He *never* helps with anything around the house.”

“She *always* blows the budget.”

“Do I *ever* get the benefit of the doubt with you?”

I could go on, but you get the idea. Carefully consider what you say and how you’re saying it. You could be revealing more about how you view your marriage than you realize.

Another sign, do you focus on your mate’s “imperfections”? I put imperfections in quotes, not because any of us are perfect, but because what many deem imperfections in others are typically comparative observations rather than actual flaws. “Why isn’t she thinner?” “Why doesn’t he work harder to provide for this family?” And once your perspective becomes skewed, it becomes even more dangerous if you begin comparing your mate to people that you know and interact with on a regular basis. “My co-worker’s great! He treats me with more respect than my husband ever has.” “The lady I see every day at the gym seems more interested in my life than my wife does.” Once you begin creating fantasy worlds with real people, fantasies which

downplay your spouse while elevating someone else of the opposite sex, Satan is enticing you to embrace a very dangerous viewpoint.

Also, is your perspective God-centered or self-centered? In years of counseling couples, I've heard "He/She is not meeting my needs" more times than I can count. Granted we all do have needs that should be fulfilled by one's mate, but our "I want it all and I want it now," consumerist, selfish, American culture has permeated many marriages. We forget that a Christian's calling in marriage is to partner with your mate to glorify God, not treat your mate as if he/she is only here to serve your pleasure. My experience is that those who are most adamant about how their needs are not being met by their spouses are typically the most selfish toward their spouses.

COOL DOWN



Having a positive viewpoint is not a cure for problems in marriage, and it is not an excuse to overlook or minimize issues that need to be dealt with. It is, however, a powerful barometer of the path you are setting for the future of your marriage relationship.

Joshua and Caleb saw the giants too. They just recognized that God was bigger. Do you see your marriage as a Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey or as a grasshopper- crushing giant? It all depends on where you focus. Because like it or not, your perception will become your reality.

God, give us eyes to see what you would have us to see that we may honor our mates and glorify your holy name. In Christ, amen.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe your current perception of your marriage?
2. What are some of the “giants” that currently threaten your marriage?
3. How are you and your spouse working together to defeat those “giants”?
4. What are some practical concrete things that you personally can do to insure you maintain a positive perspective of your marriage covenant?
5. Make a list of positive traits that you see in your spouse and post them somewhere that you will see them on a daily basis. How can doing this insure a more godly point of view?