

**Marriage Through an Eternal Lens**

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Francis and Lisa Chan have been married for over 28 years and have 7 children (All American Speakers Bureau, n.d.). Francis Chan is a 55 years old, Hong Kong native, that is a speaker, church planter, author, former teaching pastor, and founder of Eternity Bible College (People.pill.com, n.d.). His wife Lisa Chan is a teacher, preacher, speaker, author, and singer (Naijay, 2022). They co-authored the book “*You and Me Forever*”, which has the unique approach of viewing marriage and loving your spouse through an eternal lens rather than using marriage to seek happiness or personal fulfillment. The book is interactive and motivates readers to meditate and put the concepts they are learning into action. Emphasizing that knowledge without application is useless and can even be considered a sin of omission (Chan & Chan, 2014). The couple encourages Christian believers to see marriage as an overarching purpose, continually keeping in mind the bigger picture of advancing the gospel.

Consequently, the central idea and persistent theme of the book was making the mission of preaching the gospel a priority, always. According to Chan & Chan (2014), everything in a Christian’s life is to revolve around this mission, especially marriage because it is to be an example of the church’s relationship with Jesus and future union with Him. The author states that to accomplish this, it is necessary for each partner to concentrate on and cultivate their relationship with God. As a result, the person will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control), and this will enable them to fulfill the mission and love their partners, forever. Although it may seem individualistic to do this, Chan states that it is in essence giving our lives to God for others and not allowing things, people, or ourselves to be an obstacle to the mission that capacitates spouses to love and serve one another in an effective healthy manner. In addition, keeping God as the prime source to get needs and desires

met develops the faith of the partner as well as trust in God. Chan & Chan (2014), state that the only way we can provide love and give to others is through an overflow of a substantial relationship with God. Lisa Chan highlights how vital it is to not elevate any social roles (wife, mother, woman) above that of being a child of God. The authors recognize that some marriages can be exhausting and taxing but that there is always hope in God. Therefore, imagination, especially regarding a better future, is essential to marriage. Another outstanding theme was that in childrearing, parents should provide a realistic view of life, not compromise values, or overprotect kids while being role models (especially in how spouses treat each other) and staying mission focused. This concurs with Contextual Family Therapy, which holds that individual behaviors influence others, and that family depends on the marital relationship and then flow into the children and future generations (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Research done by Nocentini et al. (2022) also supported that “the quality of caregiving predicts the child’s ability to adapt to adversity” (p.2), and the healthier a family system is, the more emotional difficulties diminished and vice versa, no matter the circumstances. The book ends with challenging the readers to develop the discipline and determination required to meet the overarching goal of continuing Christ ministry here on earth, through the vehicle of family and marriage.

Many of the perspectives in the book aligned with various theories and modalities for family and marriage counseling. However, a marked difference found was that some types of family systems such as same sex, couples living apart, and transgender families were not mentioned (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Nor did the book discuss how it could be beneficial for these types of family structures or applicable to non-Christians. However, most of the contrary views found in the book appeared to be related to behavioral/cognitive behavioral concepts. Chan & Chan (2014) explains that without the Holy Spirit to transform the heart of people,

restrictions will only produce temporary behavior modification, especially when parenting children. Also, in terms of targeting maladaptive behaviors and not underlying causes, the authors believe that the root of common unproductive responses such as defensiveness, anger, blaming, and self-centeredness, come from pride and selfishness (Chan & Chan, 2014). Another opposing perspective is that couples counseling tends to focus on identifying and finding solutions to multiple factors that lead to marital dissatisfaction (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). According to Chan & Chan (2014) marital satisfaction is not the main goal of marriage, instead what needs to be identified is where individuals are seeking personal contentment in their partner or marriage, instead of in or through God. A key issue that was not discussed in the book was sexuality, perhaps because intimacy can be included alongside other human desires. The prominence of increasing positive emotional experiences (personal and environmental) in Enhanced Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy (ECBCT) differed from the author's view of not being able to rely on pleasing emotions or favorable circumstances to be well (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015; Chan & Chan, 2014).

Despite these differences the authors offered some useful advice. For example, in a marriage the worse thing to do is nothing. A warning Chan & Chan (2014) give readers is that marriage will require humility which is not an easily accepted or popular world view, but is a powerful tool to obtain a successful relationship. Chelladurai et al. (2021), reported participants identified pride, arrogance, as well as selfishness as obstacles to healthy family relationships but were motivated by religious beliefs regarding humility as a benefit to obtain good relationships. Some of these perceived benefits included better conflict resolution abilities, more respect for others and self, better empathy, balanced parenting/marriage/faith and avoiding pride. In addition, it was "observed that humility can be taught, fostered, developed, and practiced in a

family environment. Humility was reportedly best taught by example” (Chelladurai et al., 2021, p. 208). The attention and reminder to not allowing marriage to be all encompassing was a key point that could assist couples in not becoming obsessed with their relationship, while not discarding the benefits of a unified goal.

The role of imagination to create hope for the future to be able to envision the possibility of a desired outcomes, and using the Bible to exemplify that it is acceptable could be valuable for Christian clients. Yet it is also consistent with Strategic theory which holds an inherent and positive view of hope and focuses on one identified problem in the family system to potentially create a healthier pattern (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). In the book, the writers identified the neglect of the mission as the main problem that once resolved, could improve the other issues in the marriage and family structure (Chan & Chan, 2014). The section on childrearing took into account the negative effects of enabling or rescuing children from life’s realities as well as teaching them how to deal with grief and loss. It was noted that the benefit of faith in children’s lives is to equip them to deal with difficult life issues and is geared towards helping children develop resilience. A strong correlation between the clinical perspective and the book was found in structural therapy in which family hierarchy boundaries along with independent systems plays a vital role in a healthy family system (Cappuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Chan & Chan (2014) share this point of view through a biblical structure of the man as the leader of the home, the wife the submissive helper and the children obedient to parents (1 Corinthians 11:3, Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 6:1-3).

The authors addressing the difficulty and hopelessness due to only one spouse caring about the relationship, is a distinctive topic. This was a strength of the book because it recognizes the despair of these spouses but also supports how learning to differentiate and take personal

responsibility for the sake of the union can benefit the individual as well as the marriage. Smith & Hepworth (1967), agree with Cappuzzi & Stauffer (2015) that if not handled correctly, trying to counsel only one spouse can be detrimental to the marriage. However, it is possible if the counseled spouse is ready to imitate Christ humility and love out of their devotion to Him as well as a compassionate desire for the well being of the absent partner (Smith & Hepworth, 1967).

An additional contribution was the given task for individuals to address meeting their own needs rather than be dependent on their partners, to gain marital satisfaction. This is consistent with Bowenian theory in which emotional fusion can create instability and produce marital conflict, emotional distancing, and projection of marital issues onto the children (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Chan & Chan believe that proper differentiation and seeking God to provide for every need will resolve many issues caused by human limitations. However, the counsel given may not be able to be applied by those who are not spiritual (believers and non-believers) or not willing to embrace the personal work required and sacrificial nature of this approach. Some may also not think it is possible to have hope if only one spouse is willing to work on the marriage due to desires for reciprocal affection and efforts. Others may not be able to give up on their idealized view and dependency on marriage for significance since there is such a strong social influence to support it. As a clinician this book can provide hope of taking attention off the marriage and to client responsibility in extending themselves beyond a specific relationship to finding a purpose and value. As a Christian clinician the author's eternal perspective provides hope and encouragement for individuals that find themselves in seemingly impossible marriages. One way to do this could be by increasing the internal locus of control of the partner that is attending counseling. Miller et al., (1986) supports that people with higher internal locus of

control demonstrated more active and direct problem solving, had more effective communication abilities, achieved desired goals more often, and reported being more satisfied in their marriages.

Although marriage can be considered a socially constructed concept, according to Chan & Chan (2014), it was God's idea first. The authors guide readers to remember that although marriage can be great it cannot consume your life. The suggested method to view and value marriage as well as life from an eternal standpoint is effective. Even for non-believers to consider that there can be a joyful life outside of marriage and after the time here on earth is over can be compelling. For believers it is a wakeup call to recenter themselves in who they are as children of God and reinitiate the journey of the great commission to fulfill their main calling in life. To make disciples for Christ. From a clinical perspective the author gives clients an opportunity to adjust their idealistic mindsets and value systems from trivial temporary things to lasting meaningful actions. The author's desire to move readers to an altruistic attitude in life may seem difficult, but humans are created in God's image and if equipped with the Holy Spirit can imitate His character (Chan & Chan, 2014). Moving people from depending on their external circumstances to find happiness to working on the inner part of the soul can be effective both spiritually and clinically.

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