

“God’s Design for Marriage”

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Scriptural Foundation: Genesis 2:18-25, ESV

The Creation of Man and Woman

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Marriage is in trouble. It is dying in our culture and with it all hope for meaningful relationships in every sphere. God established marriage as the base from which every other relationship would be nourished and be fed. That is not to say every person must be married to have meaningful relationships, but it is simply to note meaningful relationships are profoundly affected by the state of marriage in each person’s family, in each person’s church, and in each person’s community. Where marriage dies, chaos and confusion in all human relationships thrives.

It is in the context of healthy families we learn all of the virtues necessary for healthy relationships, such as self-sacrifice for the good of others, esteem for one’s elders, personal responsibility to complete a job, courageous honesty in the face of adversity, voluntarily sharing of one’s possessions, commitment to love one another even when others upset us, right concern for the honor of one’s name, refusal to leave when relationships get messy, a willingness to forgive in the face of wrong suffering, a respect for God and His Word, a readiness to accept consequences for one’s own sins. These are just a few of the virtues we learn as a result of marriage and healthy families. Marriage supports all of these virtues. When marriages weaken, these virtues gasp for air. Indeed, no family, no church, no society can survive without them.

So, I contend marriage is worth fighting for. When we fight for marriage we are not fighting a political battle, but we are fighting for God’s glory and for the hope of the Gospel. We are fighting for our joy and for the joy of our neighbor. We cannot separate our support of the Gospel from our support of marriage any more that we can separate our support of Christ’s church from the support of the Gospel.

The assault against marriage has not only weakened our culture, but it has weakened the church itself. The primary battle we face, with regard to marriage, is spiritual and it affects every one of us. Every one of us, I believe, are called by God to engage, to strengthen, marriage, its ideals, its principles, and its applications. We read from 2 Corinthians 10,

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

The idea in this text, behind spiritual warfare, is as it relates to truth and we want to take every thought we have about marriage and take it captive to the obedience to Christ. To do so we must listen to God's voice as He is giving specific instruction for us regarding marriage.

Our goal, in this study, is to take every thought we have about marriage captive. That is a difficult task in our world because there are so many competing ideas regarding marriage.

The first theme we will address is **the character of God who created marriage**. In Genesis 1 and 2, we learn marriage does not originate with man; it is not our idea. It is not our thought as to how we can best relate to one another in society. Marriage begins with God.

From the beginning marriage is God's idea and God's creation. As such, marriage does not belong to us in the sense we have sovereign power over it. God, alone, possesses this institution of marriage and He gives it us, He yields it over to us, as a stewardship.

Marriage is not mainly about us, it is about God and about His glory. Marriage was in the heart and mind of God from the very beginning, as we have learned from Genesis 1 and 2. In the beginning, it is all about God. When we open our Bibles the first line we read is a line of power, of beauty, and fullness,

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

That verse tells us God, in love, reveals Himself to us so we can know Him and so we can worship Him. We would not have anything about this God who exists and who created this world were He not to choose to voluntarily reveal Himself to us, to describe Himself to us, and open the door to us for us to enter into a real, personal relationship with Him through His Son.

In that first, beautiful and brief line of God's revelation we discover some specific attributes regarding our God. We discover God is eternal, "In the beginning, God..." We discover He is sovereign. We discover He is self-existent and independent. We discover He is good. We discover He is all-powerful.

Let us consider God for a moment. It is impossible to think rightly about marriage if we do not think rightly about God first. The story begins with God, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Before creation God dwelt all alone with nothing and no one existing outside of Himself. There was no creation by which God revealed His glory. There was no creation to which God revealed His glory. There was nothing but God Himself and God's focus was upon nothing but Himself. His attention was upon nothing else, other than Himself and His own glory. There was no creature in which God would shed His love upon and from which God would receive love in return.

How long was God alone without anyone or anything else before He created this world? How long did God exist in that state? Let me tell you, it was not a day, not a week, not a month, and not a year, not a decade, not a century, not millennia, not millions, not billions, not trillions and trillions and trillions of years, but for all eternity. God existed in Himself, by Himself, all alone, and complete in Himself.

Do you think God was happy? If I existed all by myself, even for a week, a month would be very unbearable. I am not that interesting of a person to entertain myself for very long. I need others. I would be miserable after a few weeks of being all by myself, but was God happy for all of eternity, all by Himself? The biblical answer is, "Yes, absolutely, completely, utterly, joyful and happy." We would need others to complete us. We would need others outside of ourselves to complete us, but not God. God is complete within Himself for He is the Triune God. God experiences community within Himself, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit shedding love outside of Himself toward one another and receiving fellowship and community from one another, one God, three persons. What a mystery! As the Triune God, He always was, He is, and forever will be absolutely complete and content in Himself.

He does not need anyone or anything else to add to His joy. His joy is so complete and so perfect, as He is God it could not be added to. He is not lonely because for all of eternity, the one God experiences wonderful community in Himself.

Paul addresses the Athenians, in Acts 17, as they were worshipping a pantheon of different Gods,

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it (*this takes them back to Genesis 1:1*), being Lord of heaven and earth (*this takes them to His sovereignty*), does not live in temples made by man (*this takes them to the idea He is everywhere and omnipresent*),²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything (*He is completely independent and completely self-sufficient*), since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

He is the source of everything God and as the Source of everything good, He does not need anything from anyone outside of Himself.

I like what A.W. Pink writes, “During eternity past, God was all alone, self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in anyway, they also would have been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did added nothing to God essentially. He changes not, therefore, His essential glory cannot be augmented nor diminished. That God would create us at all is an act of His independent, sovereign will. Nothing outside of Himself moved Him. He did not have a need that came from the outside that He needed to have met. It was His own pleasure alone that motivated God in His creation of us.”

The principle we learn is: God’s relationship to us is voluntary. He has no necessary relationship with us.

A.W. Tozer, another great pastor of ages past, writes this, “The picture of nervous, ingratiating God, fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one, yet, if we look at the popular conception of God that is precisely what we see. Twentieth Century Christianity (and I might add 21st Century Christianity has even doubled down on this) has put God on charity. So lofty is our opinion of ourselves, we find it quite easy not to say enjoyable to believe that we are necessary to God, but the truth is, God is not greater for our being, nor would He be less if we did not exist. That we do exist is altogether of God’s free determination, not by our deserve nor by divine necessity.”

Why did God create the world? Why was it in the “beginning God created the heavens and the earth”? God created the heavens and the earth simply out of His pleasure to make His glory known. Is that not awesome? God created the heavens and the earth so His glory would be manifest to creatures, so His creatures would enjoy Him as we worship Him. And, so His creatures would also magnify His glory, reflect His glory, and communicate His glory through the lives we live. That is the reason why God created us in His image. If we skip down to Genesis 1, we read,

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image...”

The whole purpose of an image is to reflect the beauty of the original. If people are asked if they like the picture on their driver’s license, not many would say, “Yes, it is a great picture!” Most people would say, “No, I hate it. I am not going to let anyone look at it.” Why would we not allow that? It is only an inanimate object. Why would one hate an inanimate object? It is because we perceive ourselves to have a certain glory and that glory is not reflected in that image; “I am much better looking than that picture on my driver’s license.”

God created us in His image to reflect, as many tiny mirrors, the greatness and the glory and goodness and the beauty of His person. That is our life’s purpose. That is what brings us everlasting joy, that we, who are not necessary at all, would be made in God’s image so as to connect to God, so as to reflect His glory. That is why we exist. Isaiah 43 says this,

⁶ “...bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

In Revelation 4, the saints are gathered around the throne, crying,

¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

The King James Version says, “for your pleasure they existed and were created.”

How does all of this theology relate to marriage? What do it have to do with marriage, a practical topic? It has everything to do with marriage.

God created marriage that in marriage we might reflect specific glories of His person that could not be reflected by mankind were not marriage created. The whole design of marriage is upward, Godward in its purpose. That is where we begin so wrong in our thoughts about marriage because we have bend the purpose downward and horizontal, and that is where it remains. As long as it remains in this horizontal plane on this earthly plain, our thoughts about marriage will always be low and open to distortion.

God did not create marriage, mainly, for the joy of sex, for procreation, for companionship, or for personal satisfaction with our lives. Those are intended benefits of marriage to be sure, but God created marriage so we could find our great pleasure in magnifying the glory of God through it. If we understand that, embrace that, and grab that it will change the way we think about marriage and the way we act in marriage.

For the definition of God for marriage, we skip forward in Genesis 2. God creates marriage with His glory in view and here is what He creates,

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Everything else God created, as we read through the creation story, God said, “It was good,” “It was good,” “It was good.” He creates man in His image and He breathes into man the breath of life. Man becomes a living soul, but God says, “It is not good that man should be alone.” There is something not complete in this creation that God, in wisdom, designs to reflect His glory and His greatness.

¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

Adam was incredibly intelligent. We do not want to think of Adam as some prehistoric man. Adam is the most brilliant, I believe, of any human ever conceived and fashioned by God.

I like Mark Twain’s comment on the naming of the animals, “Adam looked at an elephant and he said, ‘That is an elephant.’ God asked, ‘Why did you call that an elephant?’ Adam replied, ‘Because it looked like an elephant!’”

Adam is able to named every animal with precise names, yet there is no one found suitable for him,

²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Verse 24 is a statement which Jesus says is a statement by God.

Notice the components of marriage God puts together. He begins with the creation of a single man made in His image, an image-bearer. This man is alone and God said it was not good. Then God adds another component; He creates a single helper who is suitable and fit for him, one who is designed to connect to him for a very special, completing way. He causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and from a rib He takes from Adam, He fashions this helper.

Note at this point, humans do not create marriage. God is the actor. It is not Adam deciding, “This is what I need,” but it is God relating and communicating this is what man needs. Then God makes the provision. All throughout this, it is God acting, God creating, God defining.

He creates this relationship, that when Adam sees the woman, he says, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Matthew Henry writes, “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam, not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

God involves two parties in marriage, one man made in the image of God and one woman also created in the image of God. God does not merely let nature take its course from there, however. God continues and He does more. He creates a very special union between this pair and He says, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” God is instituting something, not only for this first pair, but it is something that would be provided for the benefit of mankind and for the glory of God throughout all of time. God joins these two in this mystical, wonderful, sweet union where two separate people become one.

Jesus, in commenting upon this passage, in Matthew 19, says,

⁶“*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*”¹

God is involved in the marriage itself. It is God’s joining of two people, who are separate and created in His image, together into a one-flesh relationship.

Jesus is teaching us, in Matthew 19, God is creatively active in every marriage, joining one man and one woman together, into a lifelong commitment and a lifelong union. Because God is the One joining these two together, God has rights over that relationship. The two individuals do not have rights over the relationship because they did not bring that to happen; God brought those two together, so, because God made it God owns it. Jesus tells us what God made we do not have a right to tear it apart.

It is as if one of your sons was building a sand castle on the beach and it was quite an elaborate and beautiful sand castle, and a brother came over and kicked it all apart. The son who created the sand castle, what will he do at that point? He will be outraged and upset, and rightly so. The brother who kicked it over did not make it. He was intended to observe it and respect the wishes of the maker. If the creator of the sand castle decided, himself, to kick it over, you, as parents, might have said, “You should not have done that. I would have liked to see that a little longer,” but you recognize he has a right to do that. He made it, he has the right to kick it over.

But, please understand, what God says about marriage, God joined these two together. We do not have the right to come up to it and say, “I am tired of it now,” and we kick it over. We have no right to do that. It offends God and God hates that.

What is **the definition of God for** marriage? Marriage is a stewardship. From the description in Genesis 2, I made this definition: Marriage is the covenantal union God creates between one man and one woman for the display of His glory in this world, a union enduring as long as the two shall live. This is not my definition, but it is what I understand God to be defining it as He presents it to us in His Word. We have no rights to define and we have to change or alter it. God created it. It is His.

What is **the goal of God within marriage**? Many marriages fail to hit the mark because the husband and wife do not see the target. Consider it similar to being on a shooting range and you are blindfolded and asked to hit a target, it is likely you will never hit the bull’s-eye because you must see clearly in order to have hopes of having success. Many marriages fail at this point. They do not have the target in view and they wonder, “Why am I not happy, not satisfied, and not receiving the joy of God in my marriage?” It is because we miss the target. How do we glorify God in our marriage? That is the focal point, the glory of God, but our text sharpens the focus of this goal,

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

¹ King James Version (KJV)

The target is “oneness” and it is God’s target for our marriage. The target for marriage at which God sets our hearts to aim is not sexual satisfaction, financial stability, the raising of children, sweet companionship, and not personal fulfillment. These are sweet gifts which are a part of marriage, but there are secondary to the main purpose of two becoming one.

In pre-marital counseling, I use an illustration of a mountain and this is what the journey of marriage is.



When couples get married and enter into that covenant, commitment relationship God creates, they begin marching up this mountain and it is a long, arduous journey. It takes a lifetime to get to the top called “Oneness”. At the bottom is the valley called “Apartness”. When the couple gets married, they have, typically, gotten somewhere up the mountain already because they are all excited about continuing on that path. But, often times, guess what happens after two, three, five, or ten years, the couple who began with such hopes and dreams of marching up this mountain find themselves having grown apart. “What happened?” “We do not know, we just grew apart.”

The idea is they missed the principles as to what it takes in order to march up this mountain. There are forces at work on every couple that suppresses and holds them back from accomplishing the goal God has asked. For that reason, there are five issues that must be present in our life if we are going to have hope of success.

We must have a purpose and we must say, “Yes, I want oneness and that is my goal.” No one ever gets to the top of Mount Everest and asks themselves, “How did I get here?” They do not stumble upon that. If you were to get on the top of Mount Everest it is because, at some point, you decided you were going to climb Mount Everest and you get there by applying all the other principles, but if a couple does not have a purpose they are not going to have oneness.

Then, this must be a priority and everything else must be set aside that might distract us from this. This is how, being married, we give God glory and we know that because it is a foundation block for bringing God glory.

If I am preaching to you messages which are inspiring, but my relationship with my wife is not of oneness, I have lost the glory of God in my life. That is why marriage becomes the basis for everything we do and for everything we are. This is what God defines for us as to how we can bring glory and fulfill our created purpose.

Then there are provisions and this is an encouraging thing. God provides everything we need. Sometimes the journey will be hard and difficult, but know God provides everything we need in Jesus Christ. He provides us with His Word, His access, His strengthening grace and wisdom, and the Holy Spirit.

Then there is perspiration and this means we must put energy into this after we have put purpose and priority and we have grabbed hold of the provisions. We must say we will work. Marriage is hard work and we must put in energy to moving up the Mountain of Oneness.

Finally, there is perseverance, applying energy over a long period of time. There is no time for coasting.

If any of you have seen or ridden a fixed-wheeled bicycle, you understand do not stop the pedaling motion as you do on other bicycles and glide along, going downhill. On a fixed-wheeled bicycle, the rider is pedaling all of the time and marriage is like a fixed-wheeled bicycle and you must keep turning and applying energy.

By way of application to this goal of oneness, let me give a definition. What does it mean for the two to become one? Oneness is a complete union of two lives in which each knows they are incomplete without the other and through each other they are whole. It is more than living in the same house and more than sharing the same last name and more than sleeping in the same bed and more than having joint checking accounts. It is a covenant that is so intimate, so connected, so united one person fades into the other.

The functional definition of oneness is given to us in the text,

²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

That nakedness is physical and a commitment to physical union and vulnerability. It is emotional and a commitment to emotional openness where one can say, "I am going to share with you my hurts, my fears, my hopes, my dreams, my failings, my successes." It is spiritual and a commitment to spiritual openness. It is praying together, talking about God's Word together, worshipping together, confessing sin to one another, fighting temptation with one another.

Oneness goes beyond the surface and it goes so deep it is hard to even describe it. It goes well beyond the prayer at dinnertime or a brief Scripture reading with the children before they go to bed at night. It is a spiritual communion which we are walking with God together. It is physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Then there is **the means of God to achieve His goal in marriage**. How can we move toward this? Verse 24 gives us two actions,

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife...

He is to leave and hold fast. This summer I will on the other side of this leaving idea. My son, Alexander, is engaged to be married to a wonderful young lady named Kyra and in less than two months they will be married. I must tell you, the bonds I feel for my son are unbelievably strong. I remember the tears flowing down my face when he emerged into this world and I held him in my arms. There are no words to describe the kind of emotion and connection a father has at that moment. What a flood of memories I have as I think of him growing up, but I must tell you, the bonds of marriage are much stronger than the bonds between a father and son, they must be and they essentially are because that is how God created it. Alexander must leave his father and mother to be joined in a much stronger bond to his own wife.

I believe this goes beyond just leaving the father and mother. Often times children have already done that emotionally, financially, even spiritually even before they get married. It means we must leave any relationship that would interfere and interject into this one and rob it of its specialness and its security each spouse feels and knows.

Leaving includes refusing to allow any other friendship to interfere with the oneness enjoyed in marriage. Leaving means negating something and setting something aside that has been precious and good in itself, but it is not longer good enough to keep us from marching together in oneness. It means holding fast, grabbing onto, clinging onto, and focusing one's energy.

For those who are married, I ask you to evaluate yourself and think of a number and then talk about it with your spouse. The purpose is that you might glorify God all the more by growing deeper into oneness and climbing up that mountain. On a scale of one to ten, how closely does your marriage match the biblical description of oneness? Do not tell you spouse, but keep that number in your head. Later, ask your spouse, "What is your number?" Typically a

guy's number will be a "10!" because we are "awesome", but if your wife's number is a "4 or 5", do not get into an argument, but listen to her and believe her so that together you might discover what it means to pursue oneness and growth toward your marriage.

Here are three action steps. First, invest physically: time, energy, focus, passion, and money. There is a physical component to marriage. Marriage is not all about sexual relations, but it is not less than sexual relations. Invest physically so that physically you are "together" and you love being with one another.

Second, communicate emotionally. Talk with one another and open up. I know, sometimes, in some relationships this becomes very hard. There are many fears that take place that may hinder this step. There is also technology that hinders. We are used to being on the cell phone. If my wife were here, she would say, "Amen," to this. She would say, "Ritch, why don't you put your cell phone away right now." I need to listen to that because that means I am not talking with her at a level and depth I need to, to emotionally connect with her.

Third, pursue God together spiritually. Look for ways to worship God through your relationship and your family.

The last matter to consider is **the grace of God to empower marriage**. As I give to you these tasks, I understand some of you are thinking, "It is impossible. We have tried some things before and they did not work. We are way down in that valley of apartness. I want to move forward." It does take two to become one and I recognize some may be in a relationship where one refuses. God has abounding grace, sufficient grace, and providing grace for you in that as well.

For you couples who say, "We recognize this is where we want to be but we are discouraged because this is a hard path," know the grace of God is available to you to empower your marriage.

The picture of marriage is so beautiful and so pure in Genesis 2. It seems almost naturally easy for Adam and Eve to have this relationship. Adam said, "This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. This is awesome!" but what happened? Keep reading the story and we find Genesis 3 happened. Adam and Eve took the fruit and death came to them physically, and death came into their marriage. No longer did they enjoy this relationship in which it was easy to be naked and with no shame, but guess what they did? They put fig leaves on and they provided clothes for themselves because now they were ashamed. They even hid themselves from each other. Now there is a rift, a chasm, separation and conflict. All of that was brought about as a result of sin.

This is hard, but with God it is not impossible because God provides grace.

Notice what happens at the end of Genesis 3. Man put fig leaves on himself to provide for his nakedness. But, God said, "No, that is not sufficient. It does not cover you. I will make clothes for you and you can wear these clothes so you can be in relationship again." This relationship is one God intends to continue through the fall to reflect His glory, His goodness, and His greatness. He gives to us grace and He clothes us.

The first way He clothes us is through the new life He offers in Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not have the necessary tools to enter into the kind of relationship we find described in Genesis 2. Our sins will enslave us, overrun us, corrupt us, and corrupt our relationship. We will not have grace to forgive our spouse when they sin against us. We will not have grace to overcome temptation when it arrives at our door. All of that will spiral us down into this valley of apartness.

But, know God said, through His Son, salvation is offered to us and new life is offered to us, clothing, a righteousness, so we can be complete in Jesus Christ. As a complete person, now made whole, even though the effects of sin have marked our life, we are forgiven and complete in Christ and we are able to take that completion and join it to another complete person and that is why it is so important for two believers to be together, that the two people who have been given grace can become one.

Once we have received this righteousness and grace, we seek God everyday. Our marriage is not defined nor dependant upon the law by simply doing thing, but it is dependant upon an active union with Jesus Christ everyday. That is the reason why, apart from Jesus Christ, there is no way we would be able to fulfill our purpose – to bring God glory.

God has offered grace in Jesus Christ. Have you received it, first, for the forgiveness of your sin. Second, are you receiving it every day? Do you have the sense you need the grace of God in your life today, because God is a good God and He gives grace upon grace upon grace to anyone who will humble themselves before Him and that is the truth.