

Reclaiming the Purpose of Marriage

Genesis 1-2

"Let marriage be held in honor among all..." Hebrews 13:4

Introduction: When the writer of Hebrews gave rapid fire reminders to the church, he gave an invaluable statement about marriage. In the middle of encouraging *brotherly love, hospitality to strangers, remembering those in prison, fighting for contentment rather than loving money, and remembering leaders*, the listeners were to keep a fundamental and distinctive view and practice of marriage:

Hebrews 13:4 *"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous"*

This encouragement is **serious, timeless, and cautionary**. Since marriage is a glorious gift of God, created to not only be enjoyed but as a conduit to glorify and worship Him, it should be held in **honor**, which means it should be seen as **valuable and precious**. It should be a place of purity, not a place of immoral, selfish, and idolatrous behavior. But for the simple fact that this verse exists means that marriage is often **NOT held in honor** and that marriage easily CAN devolve into selfish sin and autonomous worship. This is not a new phenomenon. What is happening in our day was going on in the 1st Century and back to the first humans ever created.

But what is happening with marriage today?

Marriage is the most difficult thing you can ever do, but also the most glorious.

Marriage has been under attack since Genesis 3, which we will take a look at in detail next week. But in our current age, we find that views on marriage have been denigrated, or to say it more clearly, it has been **dishonored** in our culture.

QUESTION: Where have we seen or observed the dishonoring of marriage?

We don't need stats to tell us what we can observe, but here are some anyway:

- **Median Age of 1st marriages is now:** 28.6 for women, 30.2 for men
- **Shift of importance** – A lowering view of marriage as being essential for a fulfilling life – Fewer than 1 in 5 Americans now believe that it is essential to be married to have a fulfilling life (according to the *Institute of Family Studies* – ifcstudies.org). Personal happiness and commitment no longer rely on marital status
- **Rise of Cohabitation & Decrease of Marriage** - *Marriage rates in the United States have declined secularly since the mid-1990s. The overall share of married individuals has trended downward -- from 55.9 percent in 1996 to 46.4 percent in 2023. And the share of cohabiting couples has increased from 3.7 percent in 1996 to 9.1 percent in 2023.*¹ – Couples cite financial reasons as main reason, but also a shift in values has changed. Marriage is viewed more like a **capstone**, where marriage is a signal of everything that has led

¹ <https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2025/2/19/change-in-american-families-favoring-cohabitation-over-marriage#:~:text=Marriage%20rates%20in%20the%20United,to%209.1%20percent%20in%202023.>

up to the ceremony, rather than the beginning of a journey. Once we get everything squared away, we can consider marriage. ***How has that shifted from even 4 or 5 decades ago?***

- **Rising rate of children born outside of marriage – 40%** of children now will be born out of wedlock, and the belief is that co-habiting couples can raise their children just as well as those married.

Our goal in considering marriage in our time together is to see it through a Biblical lens rather than the way it has been distorted over time. This morning we want to look at **the purpose of marriage**, since most people, even believers, cannot answer this simple yet complex question. Without clear purpose, we move down pathways and create habits that can easily bring us away from the ideal, which then leads us away from the joy experienced in God's design. This morning we will look at **the perfect marriage**, or that which existed BEFORE sin entered the world in the Fall and corrupted everything. We will start with the ideal and move toward a restored look at marriage in the coming weeks. A couple of caveats before we look at a text:

1. **Marriage is a temporary** – In Matthew 22:23-33 (and Mark 12:18-27), the Sadducees confronted Jesus about marriage in the resurrection, trying to trap him about a scenario with multiple marriages and polygamy in heaven. His response was telling and wise:

*29 But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the **resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage**, but are like angels in heaven."*²

There will be a day when the Bride of Christ (the church) will be united with our Groom (see Rev. 19:6-10). So we approach marriage like all of life here: faithfully to live and prepare for an eternity with Christ. If marriage is temporary yet beautiful, it points to something greater to come in heaven.

2. **Marriage is not ultimate** – Though we will see marriage is a precious gift and means to glorify God, IT IS NOT ULTIMATE. It is not designed to ultimately satisfy, to complete, or fulfill. If you are single today, you will not somehow miss out on a fulfilling life if God has you remain single. And marriage is not the missing piece of anyone's life. If you are not content with God in Christ before, marriage will be disappointing, frustrating, and even idolatrous.
3. **Marriage is about God's glory** – The more we think marriage is about us, or about the benefits, or anything other than its original purpose and design, we will miss the entire meaning. John Piper said it this way: ***"Marriage exists to magnify the truth and worth and beauty and greatness of God"***. This is quintessential Piper in explanation, but suffice to say most people would not come up with a similar definition.

But does this hold up? Let's look at **Genesis 1-2 together** and see if the answer is this clear. To understand our purpose in marriage is to understand the reason why **everything exists**.

Perfect Plan by Design

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 22:29–30.

Then God said, “Let us **make man in our image, after our likeness**. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So **God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”³

The fact that we are made in the image of God distinguishes us from the rest of Creation, but also speaks to our purpose in the universe. We exist because God, in an expression of an overflow of His love, created mankind for a relationship with Him. **God does not exist for our sake, but we exist for His sake.** He did not need us to fulfill something He could not do. He was doing fine with dominion and ruling on His own. **Acts 17:25** says “nor is he served by human hands, **as though he needed anything**, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything”. We exist FOR HIM. And in making us in His image explains who we are.

He made us as His representatives, possessing character qualities of our Creator, with a capacity to know and worship Him (John 17:3). We were created to have communion with Him (Col. 3:10). We were created to both **recognize and reflect His glory**. We were made in *His likeness*, so when we love, create, show mercy, give grace, and serve, we recognize His expression of these traits. But we were also made to be **mirrors** to reflect His glory. We reflect the fact of:

Romans 11:36 “For from him and through him and to him are all things. **To him be glory forever. Amen.**”

Colossians 1:16 “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things were created through him and for him.**”

Isaiah 43:6-7 “I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
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.**”

1 Corinthians 10:31 “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God**

Marriage is not simply about what it produces but gives us a picture and means to understand the glory of God and reflect the glory of who God is.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:26–28.

Now notice two other factors of God's design in making us in His image:

- 1) **MALE & FEMALE** – In a world that screams for equality, we find it here perfectly in God's design. This means that men and women possess equal dignity, value, and full humanity. They are equally made in the image and likeness of God. This is important to remember when we talk about unique roles and functions within marriage
- 2) **WORKING OUT GOD'S IMAGE** – verse 28 tells us the *how* we play out the image of God: by multiplying and filling the earth, and exercising dominion as God's representatives, so that the whole earth will be filled with His glory (Isa. 6:3). This informs us why things like work, family, children, service, and worship matter.

Perfect Complement Displayed

Now let's look and consider how God created marriage specifically to display His glory.

Creation of Adam:

- Garden existed with no one to work it (2:5)
- Adam was created to **first** (2:7) and put him in the Garden to both **work it and keep it**.

Work – *Toil, serve, accomplish*

Keep – *Watch, preserve, protect, guard, be a watchman*

God created men to work. Even after the Fall, Adam still would work the ground (Gen. 3:23), but after the Fall there would be thorns, thistles, and sweat to bring forth a yield. But this was Adam's part of fulfilling the mandate God had given – work the Garden, exercise dominion.

- **Live by God's Command (v. 16-17)** – It is important to see what else God gave Adam by way of command and responsibility. He, and he alone, was given the specific command to eat of ALL the trees of the Garden, EXCEPT the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. From the beginning men were given God's Word as a means of leadership. This is where men often fail, either by NOT knowing or practicing God's Word in their marriage.
- **Adam was alone (v. 18)** – Now notice that the text does not say Adam was "lonely", though that may have been true as well. The need was not simply for companionship, but it was to have another with him who would help him fulfill his mission and mandate from the LORD, which is clear that he could not do alone. He needed another, a complement, to fulfill God's purpose to His glory

CREATION OF EVE:

- **Eve was created as a helper fit for Adam** – Helper here does not mean servant or something secondary, but different and complementary. In fact, God applies the word "HELPER" (*Ezer*) multiple times in the Psalms as one who Helped Israel (see Psalm 46:1, 30:10; 121:1). No one would describe God as weak, so the word here does not imply any kind of weakness. Rather, a helper must have a unique type of strength. **Fit** here is the word *kenegdo*, which means "perfect

correspondence". Adam named all living things but there was clearly nothing that corresponded to him.

- **Eve was created FROM Adam** – Adam was created from the dust of the earth, but Eve was created from the rib of Adam. God brought her to Adam as a gift, and he received her as such. NOTE there was no implication of subservience, condescension, or railing against created order. Eve did not rebuff Adam's calling her "woman".
- **Eve and Adam entered into a covenant relationship from the beginning** – Adam recognized that this one that God brought to him was the one, the one that at last fit. When he used "bone of bone and flesh of my flesh", it was the same covenant language David would use later on in terms of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1). A covenant was binding, eternal, and willing.

Perfect Picture Revealed

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.

A couple of observations of this section:

- 1) **Marriage is leaving one family to form another** – This is a timeless principle, since it was given BEFORE Genesis 3 and sin entering the world or before there were generations. Holding fast means to *stick, cling, or cleave to*. This not only informs husbands and wives, but also parents who release their children to adulthood and marriage.
- 2) **Sex was given as a sign of the covenant** – The two becoming one flesh was a sign of intimate commitment, with the allowance of a woman letting her husband into her body, with the subsequent bond signaling "two being one". This gives high value to sex and great meaning behind it
- 3) **There was no SHAME between husband and wife** – This meant nothing was hidden, from agendas to the truth. No manipulation, no silent treatment, no pride, anger, or passive aggressive comments.

NOTICE that these 3 areas are the parts of marriage Satan attacks and where marriages are in conflict: **in-laws, sex, and communication** (money too, but that's for another time).

But how does all of this correspond to purpose, or what does it have to do with God's image or glorifying Him? We'll close with the fact that marriage is created as an analogy, a way for us to see, understand, and experience the love that God has for us. When we understand this, we live it out by reflecting back the value of His worth. **Why do we say this?** *Because of what Paul says in Ephesians 5:31-32:*

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

Way back in Genesis 2, Christ's love for His Bride was in view. Marriage not only provides a mirror to glorify God, but a picture of how much Christ loves us and how we are to respond to Him. This impacts how a husband approaches his wife, a wife her husband, parents to kids, how we view God and look to impact others.

But here is the ultimate takeaway for the morning in considering the perfect marriage and our purpose in it. The purpose has got to be greater than what it produces. Marriage produces plenty of good: companionship, happiness, children, stability, community, even ministry. But the **deeper purpose for marriage has God at its very heart. It seeks to understand the glory of who God is and reflect that glory back to Him.**

Jaime Dunlop who teaches a course of marriage for Capitol Hill Baptist said, *"If 'happiness' or 'companionship' or 'children' or 'ministry' are at the heart of your purpose statement for marriage, then God is NOT the center of your marriage. He may be involved, and you will be seeking to follow Him in your marriage, but he is not the center."*

This is so important and understood by far too few. We will see that selfishness and pride are marriage killers so if do not lift our gaze high enough to see and savor the glory of God and live to know and reflect His glory, we will settle for trying to find satisfaction and value in our spouse. No spouse can shoulder that much weight of expectation. When my goal is to glorify God, then I no longer see my spouse as one there to serve me, but one I can serve and point to Christ. When my goal is to glorify and understand God's glory, I now see things like sexual intimacy as a gift of grace rather than a demand to be fulfilled. I no longer have to live vicariously through my kids or live in disappointment at our situation, but rather serve out of an overflow of seeking first the kingdom of God.

What is the chief end (or goal) of man? It is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever! Especially in marriage.

Assignment:

Consider writing two purpose statements for your marriage. 1) What would be the mission statement if someone observed your marriage currently? What would they say you value, or what you are living for? 2) What would be a mission statement if God's glory was your end goal?

Next Week: Genesis 3 – How the Fall and sin affect our marriage, and how the gospel restores what was broken and changes everything.