



THE PILLARS OF MARRIAGE

MEN OF THE WORD | GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

LESSON 1: Overview

Why This Study?

- To marvel at God's goodness in marriage.
- To strengthen existing marriages.
- To prepare men for marriage.
- To admonish and correct unbiblical attitudes, expectations, and practices.
- To point to the all-sufficient grace of Jesus Christ for forgiveness, transformation, and endurance.
- To train a brotherhood for influence.

The Six Pillars

- I. Marriage is Completion
- II. Marriage is Combination
- III. Marriage is Complementary
- IV. Marriage is Covenantal
- V. Marriage is Companionship
- VI. Marriage is Connotative

I. Marriage is Completion

Understanding God's design for marriage begins with recognizing the original reason for which marriage was created.

Marriage was designed to *complete* what was lacking in Adam as he existed in his initial solitude. Even in the sinless context early in the final day of creation, when everything else around Adam had already been pronounced "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), Adam by himself was *not* good—at least *not yet*: **Genesis 2:19–20.**

com·ple·tion:
"the act or process of
finishing something"

God initially created Adam *alone*, but He wasn't finished. God brought all the animals before Adam not only for him to name, but also so that he would recognize that there was nothing among them like him—nothing that could supply what he lacked. This object lesson had been God's design all along. The sentence that begins this particular narrative makes this clear, highlighting the first *negative judgment* in all of Scripture: **Genesis 2:18.**

It is noteworthy that God did not say that Adam needed "a companion," as if *friendship* or *romance* was the primary thing lacking. Nor did He imply that Adam needed a woman merely to *procreate*. Rather, God said that Adam needed "a helper [עֲזֵר, 'ēzer] suitable for him" (2:18), and He fashioned this "helper" from Adam's own rib (2:22).

The term "helper" emphasizes **the function** that God intended the woman to play in Adam's life. As "a helper," Eve was created to provide Adam with the necessary support he needed to fulfill his purpose on earth—the duty of "cultivating and keeping" the garden of Eden (2:15) and extending that rule over the entire earth (1:26, 28).

For Adam to perform his own function well, he *needed* Eve's assistance. As Phillips states, "God said Adam needed a 'helper' because it places the **primary emphasis on the shared mandate to work and keep God's creation under the man's leadership**" (*The Masculine Mandate*, 78–79). Contrary to our culture's depiction of the ideal male—the hero—as an unmarried, unhitched, or unencumbered man (and the married man as incompetent), God created man to function at his best with a woman as his faithful support. Thus, marriage was designed as *the finishing touch* to the ideal, innocent state of paradise. God then looked upon all He had made and pronounced that it was "very good" (1:31).

That marriage is *completion* was not only a truth for the first couple. This truth continues to serve as the bedrock for human existence and flourishing. As such, it has extensive implications for men and marriages today. Healthy marriages are born out of recognizing this truth and tracing out its implications.

II. Marriage is Combination

Biblical marriage is not the formula of $1 + 1 = 2$. Such a mindset attempts to preserve a spouse's individual autonomy—the right to *walk away from sacrifice* and *maintain control over what is "mine."* Marriage then is a matter of convenience and negotiation.

com·bi·na·tion:
"two things joined together
to form a single unit"

According to that formula, some things are mutually shared while other things are shielded. The benefits of marriage are lauded without the duties. Couples can feel secure in their marriage when convenient but ignore its obligations when deemed necessary for personal preservation.

Instead, **the biblical formula is $1 + 1 = 1$** . This mindset surrenders personal autonomy to form something new—a new state of thinking in which each spouse now considers his or her personal identity as inseparable from his or her spouse. It is no longer “me, myself, and I.” It is now “my wife and I.” This bedrock truth is established in the very beginning of Scripture: **Genesis 2:24**. The statement is so foundational that it is explicitly quoted three other times later in Scripture—by the mouth of Lord Jesus and by the mouth of the apostle Paul: **Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:7-8; Ephesians 5:31**.

Thus, it is established truth *before* man’s fall into sin (Gen 2:24) and repeated as truth *after* man’s fall into sin (Matt 19:4-6a; Mark 10:7-8; Eph 5:31). It is declared to the progenitors of the human race (Adam and Eve) as well as to specific ethnicities (to Jews in Matt 19:4-6a; Mark 10:7-8; to Gentiles in Eph 5:31). It is, by all accounts, the fundamental truth about marriage.

This *one-flesh* relationship can be illustrated in different ways, but the most vivid illustration is found in *physical intimacy*. The language of “conjugal relations” is an appropriate description of this intimacy, since the term “conjugal” is derived from the Latin terms *con* (“together”) and *jugum* (“a yoke”), forming the term *conjugal* or “yoked together.”

Indeed, God designed sexual activity between a husband and wife for the purpose of procreation. But producing children in their likeness is not its ultimate purpose. Nor is it intended merely as stress-relief or for pleasure. Instead, its transcendent purpose is to remind the husband and the wife that they are existentially *yoked to each other*. Nothing can communicate this message so vividly.

For this reason, the apostle Paul gives to married couples these important instructions: **1 Corinthians 7:3-4**. It is important to notice the **mutual submission** inherent in Paul’s words. Because of this exceptional $1 + 1 = 1$ identity, mutual submission in sexual relations becomes the rule. Paul does not permit one spouse *to dominate* over the other in the marriage bed, but rather commands that both fulfill their “duty” to each other. He does not permit one spouse *to disregard* the other by withholding what he or she desires, but rather commands both to regard the other above oneself. He does not permit one spouse *to demand* certain pleasures from the other, but rather commands both to surrender the “authority” over his or her own body to the other spouse. Finally, Paul does not permit the idea of having *to earn* intimacy from one’s spouse who offers it only as *quid pro quo* for other expectations met, but teaches that intimacy between a husband and wife is to be expected, unconditional, free, and frequent.

Consequently, sexual activity outside of this formula of $1 + 1 = 1$ is a serious sin: **1 Corinthians 6:16, 18; Hebrews 13:4**.

All kinds of practical implications arise from this $1 + 1 = 1$ formula, including how couples register the title for their home, to the illegitimacy of prenuptial agreements, to the handling of finances. At the same time, this formula does not imply the annihilation of personality traits, personal preferences, or individual interests. As R. C. Sproul stated, “The unity of marriage is not to be monistic but a unity in duality” (*The Intimate Marriage*, 31).

III. Marriage is Complementary

God’s design for marriage includes the recognition that **marriage was designed by God to be complementary in nature**. God did not create a *clone* for Adam. He created a *woman*. This difference is to be celebrated.

com·ple·men·ta·ry:
“relating in such a way as to
enhance or emphasize the
qualities of each other”

On the one hand, **the woman is the same as man** since she is formed from Adam’s rib (Gen 2:22). She wasn’t formed from another substance, for that would have then suggested that she was different from man *according to essence*. Instead, the woman shares *essential equality* with man in that she was taken directly from man himself and thus established as a co-equal image-bearer of God: **Genesis 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12**. This truth is later reemphasized in Scripture by the fact that a woman’s salvation is the same as a man’s salvation. Both are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice, and both inherit the same glory: **Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7**.

On the other hand, **the women is different from man** since she was created with **a different psychology, a different physiology, and a different function**. All of this works together to make her the ideal *helper*. She was created not to *compete* with Adam for the role of “cultivating and keeping” the garden (Gen 2:15), but to fill a role for which Adam wasn’t made: **1 Corinthians 11:8–9**.

That Adam maintained his leadership role in creation even after the creation of Eve is indicated by the fact that he not only *named* the animals (Gen 2:20), but he also *named* the woman—an act that shows *authority*: **Genesis 2:23**. Furthermore, this distinction is observed in the specifics of the curse levelled against Adam and Eve after their sin. Eve was cursed in the sphere of her *childbearing*: **Genesis 3:16**. Adam was cursed in the sphere of his *cultivation of the ground*: **Genesis 3:17–19**. This recognition of the complementary nature of marriage led to Peter’s admonition to men to recognize and value their wives’ uniqueness: **1 Peter 3:7**. It also led Paul to emphasize unique responsibilities for both men and women: **Ephesians 5:23–24; Colossians 3:18–19; Titus 2:4–5**

It is this *sameness yet distinction* between men and women that utterly disallows *interchangeability* in marriage. Men can never marry men, nor can women marry women. The attempt to do this is a heightened expression of moral corruption and rebellion against the Creator (Rom 1:24–27).

IV. Marriage is Covenantal

Marriage is not a contract with fine print detailing exceptions and exclusions. It does not allow for a trial period that can end in no-fault dissolution. It is not a relationship that you “try on to see if it fits.” According to the Bible, **marriage is an exclusive and life-long relationship that is established and held together by a covenant**. Marriage is established and held together not by romance, shared interests, or financial convenience, but by *solemn promises*. Marriage isn’t about *feelings*. It is first and foremost about *the will*.

cov-e-nan-tal:
“relating to or
involving a solemn,
binding agreement”

That God has designed marriage to operate on the basis of *covenant promises* can be seen in His condemnation of those who break such promises. For example, see: **Proverbs 2:16–18; Malachi 2:13–16; Matthew 19:3–6**.

The institution of marriage is the culmination of God’s creative activity, and when He finished this last creative act, He declared everything “very good” (Gen 1:31). This “very good” creation included the establishment of marriage as an exceedingly unique human relationship that from the start was to be: *between two sexes* (a man and a woman); *exclusive to two people* (no one else included); and *life-long* (it was until death).

This uniqueness is expressed when the groom and bride exchange *marriage vows* on the wedding day. These vows cannot be tentative promises. They cannot be made with fingers crossed or exclusions implied. They are *verbal oaths*, and **every word counts**. After all, that is the nature of a vow. God takes them seriously: **Ecclesiastes 5:4–6**.

Wayne Mack stated it well: “Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the total person with another person until death” (*Strengthening Your Marriage*, 6). Jesus Himself states, **“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate”** (Matt 19:6).

IV. Marriage is Companionship

One of the marvelous illustrations of God’s goodness to humanity is the capacity He created within marriage for *companionship*. He designed marriage not only for the fulfillment of roles and the procreation of children. **He designed marriage also for cleaving and weaving, for friendship and romance**—the kind of which can never be experienced outside of the marriage bond. When married life is lived out according to God’s plan, by His grace, and for His glory, marriage becomes a sweet and safe haven, especially in a fallen, treacherous world.

com-pan-ion-ship:
“a sense of closeness
and enjoyment of being
with another person”

That romance is God’s design for marriage is supported by the fact that an entire book of the Bible—*The Song of Solomon*—is devoted to the topic. As to the purpose of Song of Solomon, John MacArthur writes,

Solomon's ancient love song exalts the purity of marital affection and romance. It parallels and enhances other portions of Scripture that portray God's plan for marriage, including the beauty and sanctity of sexual intimacy between husband and wife. . . . The Song of Solomon expands on the ancient marriage instructions of Gen. 2:24, thus providing spiritual music for a lifetime of marital harmony. It is given by God to demonstrate his intention for the romance and loveliness of marriage, the most precious of human relations and "the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). ("Introduction to Song of Solomon," *The MacArthur Study Bible*).

The overall theme of Song of Solomon is captured well in other statements in the Bible's wisdom literature: **Proverbs 5:15–19; 18:22; Ecclesiastes 9:9.**

As Solomon concludes, marriage is a special "reward" (Eccl 9:9) which God has given to mitigate the harsh realities of life in a world that groans under the curse. His command is simple: "Enjoy life with her." John Chrysostom stated it this way:

Marriage does not exist to fill our houses with war and battles, to give us strife and contention, to pit us against each other, and make our life unlivable. It exists in order that we may enjoy another's help, that we may have a harbor, a refuge and a consolation in troubles which hang over us and that we may converse happily with our wife. (*On Marriage & Family Life*, Homily on 1 Peter 3:7).

Martin Luther was right: "To have peace and love in a marriage is a gift that is next to the knowledge of the gospel."

IV. Marriage is Connotative

That marriage is *connotative* indicates that marriage is not the end in itself; it is to point to an additional idea—the **transcendent reality of Jesus' Christ's love for His church**. Thus, for believers in Jesus Christ, marriage includes the responsibility of living out the marriage in such a way that it **proclaims a redemptive message to a fallen world in need of the gospel**.

con·no·ta·tive: "implying an association or idea beyond the explicit meaning of a word or phrase"

As part of its universal impact, sin's entrance into the human race (Gen 3) acutely corrupted the marriage relationship. The husband no longer "naturally" keeps and protects his wife but is prone to lord it over her or abandon her. The wife no longer "naturally" helps her husband but is prone to dishonor him and betray him. Under the influence of sin, marriage can become a context for the worst kinds of evil. Such corruption is observed shortly after Adam and Eve's fall. Within a few generations, Lamech becomes the first polygamist, directly rejecting God's creation ordinance of one man and one woman for life (compare Gen 4:19–24 with 2:24).

But the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ provides married Christians with the ability to live out a distinctively divine purpose. Together, a believing husband and believing wife can together reflect the glories of God and point others to Him and the redemption He offers. The believing husband in particular has the responsibility of imitating Christ's love for His church in his own love for his wife: **Ephesians 5:25–32**.

Thus, marriage provides a powerful opportunity for Christian men to lead their wives in ways that witness to Christ's character—both to their wives and to the watching world. Marriage equally provides a powerful opportunity for Christian women to submit to their husbands in ways that demonstrate the benefit of subjection to Christ. And the impact of this witness only grows brighter as the culture around grows darker. A faithful couple, living out their marriage according to God's design, become effective missionaries to their families and communities.

Now What?

- Begin to meditate upon these six truths.
- Prepare for some deep conviction in the months to come.
- Pray for receptivity and transformation.
- Consider how you can play a part in influencing others for good.
- Rejoice in grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is able to cover every sin and failure.

Audio, video, and handouts for this session are available at www.gracechurch.org/motw.