

GOD-DESIGNED MARRIAGE

Building Block #5 – The Closeness

We are deep into a series called God-Designed Marriage, looking to build strong and healthy marriages according to God's design. So far, we've laid the foundation by looking at The Culture, The Canvas, The Covenant, The Charge, and The Care of marriage. Today we will continue the tacky alliteration, but at least a hopefully somewhat memorable alliteration, by looking at **The Closeness**, the intimate side of the marriage relationship.

This is an important subject for us to talk about because much of the church's silence on the subject does more harm than good and as a pastor, I want to help equip parents to be the teachers of their children on this subject. I don't know about you, but I grew up thinking sex was something of a taboo and especially in church. You could talk about it everywhere but in the home or in the church. I've never heard anyone see that if you want to understand sex or enhance your sex life you need to study the Bible! On the contrary, it was probably a religious person who taught you there were good parts and bad parts of your body. Most of us, I would image, never had anyone that we could talk to comfortably and intelligently about this subject. As a kid, I remember thinking all sex as something sinful. What I learned about it, I learned about from friends at school through various jokes and comments. Funny story, when I was in middle school, we had to read various books and we had to pick out a few words in each chapter that we didn't know what they meant and look them up. Well, in one particular book I chose the word fornication. My 7th grade teacher was a bit surprised, but I was just being honest. Everybody in class kind of got a kick out of it.

But when I began to open up the Bible, I was more surprised than my middle school teach when I began to understand God is the author and inventor of sex and that He created man and woman to enjoy it *before* sin ever entered the world. Before sin, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed before God in the consummation of their marriage (Gen. 2:21). It's a good thing. The first command in the Bible in Genesis 1:28 was to be fruitful and multiply. Not only that, but it's also very theological. It's not just a good thing, it's a God thing, and a very powerful one. But because it is very powerful, it must be handled with care. When something is powerful like dynamite you handle it with care, don't you? You get it into the right hands and it can be used for good. It wasn't until Alfred Nobel invented dynamite that they were finally able to complete the canal, the short cut for ships, that runs through Corinth – after hundreds of years and many failed attempts. It can be good. But dynamite in the wrong hands can also be used to destroy lives. Sex is like that. It is powerful, and it can be very powerful blessing or powerful curse in your life. Today we'll look at 3 reasons why God created sex and how we can preserve the sanctity of it.

Genesis 1:26-28 says, *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue; and*

rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” So the first reason God created sex is for the propagation or mankind. Reproduction.

I. **PROCREATION.** (Gen. 1:28; Deut. 7:13-14)

This is basic biology our culture needs today, but through the physical union, man and woman have the privilege of connecting with the sovereign God of the universe in creating another eternal human being. It's a big deal. And it's miracle if you ask me. When He created us, He equipped us for this. I believe His blessing on Adam and Eve was the impartation of the ability to propagate. While our culture tries to create a gender blender and in some cases thinks of babies as parasites, the Bible says our attitude toward it should be exactly the opposite of that.

Children are blessing from God.

And praise the Lord for the recent SCOTUS ruling overturning Roe vs. Wade. We need to keep praying that our nation and the state representatives see children as a precious blessing and not a threat to our personal prosperity. Abortion is repacked, neo-paganism. But in **Deuteronomy 7:13-14**, God was promising to the nation of Israel that if they kept His Mosaic Law/Covenant, remaining true to Him, He would bless them with offspring. It says, *“He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there will be no male or female barren among you and your cattle.”* Now, please notice this is not a promise to us, but specifically a promise to the nation of Israel in a unique time period where they stewarded the Theocratic, Mediatorial Kingdom of God on earth. There are many very godly people today who love Jesus and serve Jesus with all their heart who can't have kids. God has different wills for each of our lives and we need to trust that His will is good no matter what (easier said than done). The point is, we need see God's sovereignty over it and see it as His blessing.

Psalm 139:13-16 tells us God is sovereign over this area of our lives and to trust Him in that. All of us are skillfully and wonderful knitted together by God in the womb and in His book are written all the days ordained for us when as yet there was not one of them. **Psalm 127:3** says, *“Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”* Children are a reward. A gift. A heritage. They are fruit from your marriage covenant to be enjoyed. They sweeten our lives in many ways. To bear children is the first reason. However, there is some danger in thinking of sex as merely a reproductive act. We also need to see that God created sex in part to be something pleasurable. Like I said last week in James 4, there is a way in which God designed us for pleasure, but pleasure should not be sought apart from obedience to God. Pleasure can be good or bad depending on our character – seeking it our way or God's way.

II. **PLEASURE.** (Gen. 2:24-25; Song of Solomon 4-5; Proverbs 5:15-19).

Now, this might be a little surprising for some of you, but again, the first glimpse of the intimate side of marriage that we see is in **Genesis 2:24-25** where Adam and Eve are enjoying and delighting in each other and consummating their marriage without shame before God. The public marriage covenant grants you the license to retreat privately to enjoy this “one flesh” relationship. And when done God’s way, it’s a beautiful thing. Instead of shame or guilt, there is peace, joy, and security.

Doing things God’s way produces security.

I know I’ve said this at least once, but when you exercise self-control and wait until marriage, you are building a foundation of trust. Each partner knows the other partner has self-control before marriage and therefore, will have self-control after marriage when various temptations come along. You’ll rest knowing your partner is not being driven by their lusts. They aren’t in it for the sex. That’s not their primary goal. And you don’t have to worry about performing. When we talked about the marriage covenant, I told you about a man named George who divorced his wife, bought a bachelor pad near the beach, and started sleeping around but every morning he would wake up hating his empty lifestyle. It was cold. He told his friend, *“You know what I’d really like? I’d like to go home tonight, smell dinner cooking, hug my wife hello, and spend the evening telling her and showing her how much I love her. I’d like to go to bed with her and not have to prove my virility, not have to sexually perform above the call of duty, but just to give her love, and go to sleep knowing she’d be there in the morning.”*¹ Hollywood’s ideal picture of intimacy isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. It’s empty and unfulfilling. God’s way brings security and fulfillment.

Scripture encourages married couples to **delight in each other frequently**. The **Song of Solomon** is basically a book about it. *“How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats... your temples are like a slice of pomegranate... your neck is like the tower of David... there is no blemish in you.”* **Proverbs 5:15-19** encourages a man to enjoy his wife and stay faithful to her. *“Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.”* Don’t you love that? Sex is a delight to be enjoyed within marriage. Be exhilarated always with your spouse. Enjoy them often.

In **1 Corinthians 7:1-6**, Paul encourages a husband and wife to mutually submit to each other’s needs in this area with frequency. *“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote ourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this is say by way of concession, not of command.”* So when a husband and wife have become one, they have given up the exclusive right to themselves. They belong to each other. And I like how Paul says, I say this by way of concession, not of command, because neither the husband nor wife should command their partner to fulfill their duties. It’s voluntary reciprocation with some

give and take on both sides. The spouse who desires to make love more often can exercise self-control and the spouse who desires it less often can lovingly serve their spouse. And this passage is very helpful because in marriage we should try to keep our focus not on pleasing ourselves, but on pleasing our spouse. The best lovemaking in the world is not limited to two people with perfectly sculpted bodies, but between two healthy lovers who are more interested in satisfying their partner's needs.²

To deprive one another would be harmful or detrimental to the marriage. In his book *The Act of Marriage*, Tim LaHaye tells about how during his time as a ministerial student, one of his friends got married. About a year into the marriage, he went from an easygoing guy to being very irritated. It turned out that his wife was under the notion that sex was only for the propagation of the race, something mechanical. And since they agreed to delay in starting a family until after graduation, he became rather frustrated. Well, fast forward several years and LaHaye is confronted by a lonely looking woman in her forties after a church service, who happened to be his friend's ex-wife. After 20 years and 4 sons later, apparently the day came when he couldn't tolerate her self-imposed celibacy and became attracted to someone who was responsive to his needs. LaHaye says, "*While his decision to leave his family cannot be condoned in a Christian, I am confident, knowing the youthful character of the man and his commitment to Christ, that it would not have happened if his wife had not been afflicted with an unbiblical mental attitude toward married love making... What kind of God would go out of His way to equip His special creatures for an activity, give them the necessary drives to consummate it, and then forbid to use it?... When we look at it objectively, we realize that sex was given at least in part for marital enjoyment.*"³

III. PICTURE. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:23-25; Eph. 5:22-33)

We've talked about this more than once so I won't belabor the point too much, but marriage paints a theological picture. The mysterious and glorious doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God who exists in three Persons. There is both a plurality and oneness to God. When God created man and woman in His image, His creation of them is expressed in singulars and plurals and in a certain order. Adam was created first from the dust, but not Eve. Eve is taken from Adam's side, and joined to him again to portray the relational nature of God. They are two, and yet one.

Marriage pictures the plurality and oneness of the Triune God.

Nowhere is that pictured greater than in the physical union. As we've learned from Ephesians 5:22-33, marriage also mysteriously reflects Christ and the Church.

Marriage pictures Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5:32 says, "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" This mystery is great but I am referring to Christ and the Church." When the husband and wife finally come together to consummate their marriage, it is a glorious moment and one of the most enrapturing moments one can experience in this life.

However, it doesn't compare to that future moment when the Church, as the bride of Christ, is raptured at the most-glorious moment of His return (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The Husband & His bride are joined forever. Remember, in heaven, there is no marrying and given in marriage. The only marriage is our marriage to Christ and the wedding supper of the Lamb (Matt. 22:30).

As you can see, lovemaking is very theological and for that reason, must be kept pure. The picture that marriage is, is in my mind the greatest incentive for purity and faithfulness. Through our faithfulness to God in this area of life, we are painting a mysterious picture for the world and glorifying Him. And God cares about the picture, the typology. Moses was disciplined when He struck the rock twice in the wilderness and ruined the picture that it was supposed to be. I'll just let you think about that. But since we all wrestle with the sin nature, we need to talk a bit about preserving the sanctity of the marriage bed.

IV. PRESERVATION. (Heb. 13:4; Rom. 13:14; Deut. 24:5)

Hebrews 13:4 says, "*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be kept pure.*" You know, just because you get married doesn't mean the lust and temptations go away (1 Cor. 7:2). Satan, society, and the sin nature are trying to get us to stumble. We have to guard our marriages. So real quick I have 4 more P words to preserve the sanctity of marriage.

Prioritize: Prioritize your relationship with God. (2 Cor. 11:3)

First and foremost, we were created for a relationship with God. Sex, I believe, is the greatest picture of the soul's longing to be intimate with God. We long for someone to know us completely, someone we can be totally transparent and intimate with who connects on a deeper level. The people try to satisfy that longing through sex and though it's very satisfying when done God's way, even then it cannot ultimately satisfy the soul's longing for a relationship with God. When our vertical relationship with Him is in its proper place, the desire for anything less than God's standards is greatly curbed. Remember, in marriage the closer you are to Him, the closer you'll be to each other.

Put off: Providing opportunities for the flesh.

Put on: Christ's power. (Rom. 13:14)

Romans 13:14. "*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.*" So first, **make wise decisions** about where you go and what you surround yourself with. Sometimes we provide opportunities for the flesh to be enticed and then wonder why we struggle with purity. If you are trying to lose weight, you don't keep a candy dish setting out or cake on the counter! You get rid of it! If you want to stay pure, throw out the trash that tempts you. Find an **accountability** partner. Take advantage of different apps like *Covenant Eyes* that control or remove illicit content on your devices – don't let devices become a vice. **Memorize Scripture** like Psalm 119:9 or 1 Cor. 10:13 which says God always provides a way out when tempted. Like Joseph, sometimes you just **flee** from temptation. Run! (Gen. 39:12; 1 Cor. 6:18). Secondly, remember your **calling** and position

in Christ. You have been justified, washed, and declared righteous in Christ and your practice is to line up with that position. And you can because in Christ you have new **power** by the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. We have been strengthened with power through His Spirit and given everything we need that pertains to life and godliness. (Eph. 1:19; 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:3) but we have to learn to rely on God's power and choose to live for His glory.

One thing I always mention in pre-marital counseling is to put off working far from home. Every job has its seasons, I know, but quit the consistently long-distance jobs like over the road trucking for the singles. In **Deuteronomy 24:5**, the Law of Moses forbade newlywed men from serving in the army or being charged with any duty that would keep him away from home. *"He shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken."* You know what's really interesting about it? That command immediately follows regulations on divorce. I think we are supposed to take a hint from that. Fight for your marriage, even if it means a paycut or job change.

Perfect: Your spouse is perfect for you. (Gen. 2:22)

Whenever you're tempted, remember that just like God made Eve perfectly for Adam and brought her to him at just the right time, so God in His sovereignty made your spouse for you and brought both of you together at just the right time. You are perfect for each other. If your mind starts to wonder about someone else, think: *"I probably wouldn't like their personality anyway"* and *"Thank you God for my spouse. They are perfect for me."*

Purposeful: Be purposeful in your everyday interactions. (Prov. 21:9; 1 Cor. 16:14)

Our everyday experiences and communication affect our intimacy. The bodily union will be cold if we aren't connecting on the deeper levels of mind and spirit. Proverbs 21:9 says, *"It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife."* That's funny, but true! If living with someone is like walking on eggshells, there won't be any tender intimacy. No one wants to be close grumpy, complaining person. Try to maintain positive, daily interactions where you connect in mind and spirit. Check in on one another: send texts to let them know you're thinking about them. Hold hands. Buy them some flowers or a gift like their favorite treat. Write a note telling them how thankful you are for them. Talk about deep things going on in your heart that you wouldn't talk to anyone else about. Ask how you can pray for them. One of the best things you can do is to pray together. When you pray for and with each other you are connecting on a deeper level and that's where true intimacy starts.

Challenge: Sit down with an older couple and just learn from them. Ask questions. Let them talk.

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Strike the Original Match* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 44..

² LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, 1988), 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.