

GOD-DESIGNED MARRIAGE, PART 2

Building Block #1 – The Canvas

Last week we started a new series called God-Designed Marriage and we looked at several down-to-earth reasons for studying God's design for marriage as revealed in the Word of God. We talked how necessary it is for our homes and marriages to be built on the rock of God's Word and His perfect design revealed in it, and not the sand of our own ideas or desires or what the world says about it. His design does not need to be improved upon or adapted to cultural whims. Only when we do marriage God's way do we experience God's blessing on our lives and homes and society. Only when we do marriage God's way do we experience the fulfilling oneness and intimacy we desire from our marriages. That oneness is what we're about to talk about today as we place our first building block of marriage called "The Canvas". A canvas is a something that you paint on. And marriage can be thought of as a canvas that paints a picture for the world about who God is and what He is like. *What picture is your marriage painting?*

God designed marriage to mysteriously portray a heavenly, theological truth that much of the world is completely clueless about, even among the married. And at first this is going to seem like it's pie in the sky, dreaming material for those of you who like the down to earth stuff, but theology (an understanding of God and the things of God) primarily and more permanently shapes our practical application and teaches us how to live in the first place. If you know much about visioning, every practical goal is just a piece of accomplishing some greater mission or vision. If your company has good leadership, they have a mission or vision and they set specific goals to make that mission happen. Well, our marriages too, must have a greater vision to operate by to guide us in day to day married life. When marriage gets tough, a husband and wife need a greater reason to stick together than their own happiness. They need a vision.

In The Art of Marriage study at our house, they were going around and interviewing kids and adults on the street why they think people married. Some said:

- Kids: I don't know.
- Kids: Because they want kids
- Kids: Because they want to spend their lives with their best friend
- Kids: it's fun to get married! (it's a big party!)
- Adults: For money – if they have bookoo bucks
- Adults: They think it's going to fix them and their relationship
- Adults: It's tradition (it's what parents and grandparents have done)
- Adults: They want a lifelong partner or a family
- Adults: They want to express their sincerity of love for them through marriage

When most people get married, they don't grasp the grandeur of what God doing. Even though I truly believe God created marriage to bring personal happiness to our lives and some of those reasons people gave, we need to know He also created it with the heavenly purpose of revealing

spiritual truth: revealing God's nature and character to the world. If our reason for getting married is only, "I think it will make me happy" or because "It sounds like a good idea" or "everyone else is doing it", that's not enough to see me through the inevitable difficulties of marriage. I'll say sayonara as soon as it's not making me happy anymore and I'll keep looking for "the one" who will make me happy. So please turn with me to Genesis 1, the book of Firsts or Beginnings, where we find the first marriage between the first man and first woman. We'll start studying these heavenly truths that give marriage enduring an enduring mission and vision to operate by.

1:26-28: *"Then God said, "Let Us make mankind 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 livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth." So 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 it; 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 Genesis 1 covers the whole week of creation briefly. Genesis 2, however, zooms in on and expands on what specifically took place on day 6 when He created man.*

2:7 *Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person....* **15** *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.* **16** *The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; **17** but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."* **18** *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."* **19** *And out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.* **20** *The man gave names to all the livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.* **21** *So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.* **22** *And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.* **23** *Then the man said, "At last this is bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called 'woman,' Because she was taken out of man."* **24** *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."*

I. THE PICTURE OF ONENESS. (VV. 1:26-28; 2:4-24)

If you were just reading through the Genesis account plainly for the first time, **verses 26-28** would probably be more of a shock to you, as I believe they're intended to be (much like Enoch's rapture in the repetitive descriptions of chapter 5). So far in the creation account it's been very monotonous and repetitious. **Then God said, "Let there be" – it was good** – there was **evening and morning**. Day 1, day 2, day 3, day 4, day 5, and even half-way through day 6.... But half way through day 6, there is a this big moment, and a deliberation in the Godhead where God says "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over [creation]." At that point,

we should think, *“Okay, wow. There’s something special about man. He didn’t make the rest of creation in His image, but only man. Man, made in God’s image, rules over creation.”*

We should also see at this point the seeds of God’s Trinitarian nature through the use of singular and plural references to God (Us, Our). God has both a **plurality** and a **oneness** to Him. He is **triune**, meaning that God is one being who exists eternally in 3 Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **God is by His very nature and essence, a relational being.** Throughout all of history and before the creation of man or angels or any other created thing, God was never alone. He has always been in a mutually self-giving, others-glorifying, loving, community relationship. It’s what some theologians call **the Dance of God**, which suggests that no member of the Trinity ever sits still in the middle and demands the other orbit around Him. They orbit around each other. The Father glorifies and lives for the Son, the Son the Father, the Spirit the Son, etc.

C. S. Lewis said, *“In Christianity God is not a static thing . . . but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.”* Another theologian said, *“The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to one another. . . . Each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others.... God’s interior life [therefore] overflows with regard for others.”* Keller said, *“If this is ultimate reality, if this is what the God who made the universe is like, then this truth bristles and explodes with life-shaping, glorious implications for us. If this world was made by a triune God, relationships of love are what life is really all about.”*ⁱ I think it’s safe to say that marriage reflects this.

Marriage reflects the relational oneness of God.

I think this is why both God’s deliberation and man’s creation is stated in **singulars** and **plurals**. And that’s why instead of creating both Adam and Eve from the dust as totally distinct individuals, Adam is created first and Eve is created *from Adam*, and then *joined* (we could say “glued”) back to Adam in the oneness of marriage. Describing the Trinity. Jesus said, *“I and the Father are one.”* (Jn. 10:29, 38). He is in the Father and the Father in Him. Well, in marriage **two become one flesh**. And Eve is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I believe God’s design for marriage, including the intimate side of the relationship is theologically mind blowing.

Paul in the New Testament for various reasons we cannot discuss today will say it is good not to marry. Singleness has its advantages in times of persecution and as far as being able to be completely devoted to God (1 Cor. 7). But even for the single person, he must know why Genesis 2:8 says **it is not good for man to be alone**. Every other thing God created was good. At the end of the day, it was good. It was good. It was good. But after He creates Adam and Adam is by himself, he says it is not good. It wasn’t good for Adam to be alone trying to steward God’s creation by himself. The poor guy needed help! But also, He was made in God’s image which means he was also **made for relationships** – a relationship with God and relationships with others.

Marriage is good.

So Proverbs 18:22 says, *“Therefore, he who finds a wife, finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”* We weren’t made to live in isolation. People need to be connected to others. It’s a major part of why the 2020 shutdowns were so depressing. Or why when we try to live for ourselves and our interests alone – when we try to sit static in the middle and get others to orbit around us and worship us, favoring money, power, possessions, adventures, and accomplishments over human relationships – you will “dash yourself on the rocks of reality.” The reality is you were never meant to live for yourself alone, but were made for loving relationships. Love being more than a mushy feeling but a sacrifice of self for another’s. As long as we live for ourselves, we won’t know what it’s like to really live. Jesus taught on multiple occasions how you must lose yourself in order to find yourself. Unless you, as a seed, die, you will not bear fruit (Jn. 12:24). If you live for yourself instead of the glory of God and for others, you are out of touch with your own nature and reality.ⁱⁱ

This is why so many marriages can’t seem to get it together. They go into it for their own happiness – and in some measure that’s okay – but your marriage will only start to click when you sacrificially love for your spouse. The best intimacy is not between two people who look like Ken and Barbie but between two people focused on meeting each other’s needs.ⁱⁱⁱ In marriage, you can dance, or dispute. Compete, or complete. Manipulate to get them to serve you, or model Christ. If there is competition, let it be a competition to see who can put the other first – who can be more Christlike. This is part of why marriage is good. It sanctifies us by conforming us into the likeness of Christ. Add kids to mix and it really changes you!

II. THE PICTURE OF CHRIST & THE CHURCH. (Eph. 5:22-33)

Ephesians 5:22-33, a passage we’ll spend more time in later, says, *“For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.... ‘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.”*

If you understand marriage was designed to picture Christ and the Church, it changes your choices. In an argument, a spouse might just say, *“You know, this isn’t just about us. This is about Christ and demonstrating His gospel of love and grace and mercy and forgiveness to the world. I think I can get over the fact that you left the toilet seat up!”* We have a purpose to live for that is much higher than ourselves, one that unites us in mission, and teaches us how to maintain that oneness. We’re going to forgive each other and stick with it because it’s what Christ does for us and it is that relationship that we model. You have to think, *“My marriage is a statement to the world and a gospel testimony^{iv} about who God is. It is painting a picture for the world about God.”* Our marriages are like seminaries teaching everyone about God. I want to be able to say to my kids, *“If you want to know how Christ loves the Church, watch the way I love your mom. If you want to know how the Church respects Christ, watch the way your mother treats me.”*

Marriage is God's idea.

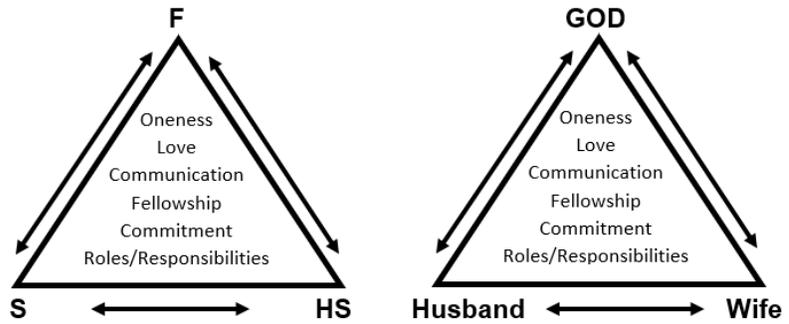
These passages also reminds us that marriage is **His idea**. It is not man's idea or a social construct. He invented it. He holds the patent.^v Man and woman did not start getting married and God said, *"Hey, marriage is good depiction of me and my relationship with My people. I think I'll use that as an illustration!"* No, God planned marriage before the foundation of the world to mysteriously communicate God's nature and faithfulness to His Church (1 Cor. 11:3) and to effectually cast unconditional love into a sinful, cancel culture world.

Maybe nothing demonstrates this was God's idea more than how God made Adam realize his need for a wife! God has all of these animals walk by Him in pairs as Adam names them. I imagine these animals are walking by male and female, rooster and hen, buck and doe, ram and ewe... and it's getting towards the end of the line and he's thinking, *"Wait a second. All of these animals come in pairs. Where's my counterpart?"* Chapter 2, verse 20, says, *"But there was not found a helper suitable for him."* So once Adam realizes his need of an Eve, God goes to work and does some surgery. He puts Adam under, in sleep (the first anesthesia?) and takes a rib from Adam and fashions from that rib, a woman (*By the way, ribs are a bone that regenerates themselves when removed properly. Ribs are sometimes removed during surgeries to do bone grafts in other parts of the body. If the rib is removed from the periosteum (the tissue around the bone), which is kind of like taking the banana out of the peel, the rib will regenerate.*^{vi} *Only God would know that back then and dare to record this as a historical event*). But Eve is taken from Adam and for Adam to be his helpmate. Together they are going to carry out the will of God. It's neat to me to think that just as Adam and his bride were rule over God's creation, **Christ (the Last Adam – 1 Cor. 15:46)** and **His Bride (the Church)** will rule in the Millennial Kingdom. It's a great mystery, isn't it!

But let's also note that **God created Eve perfectly for Adam**. Adam was put in a deep sleep by God while He created Eve. Adam didn't have a say in the matter or an assembly line to choose from. He didn't make any suggestions about hair color, eye color, body style, height, weight, or whatever. Why? Because that's not what matters most. While Hollywood tends to make sentiment and the externals the most important thing in the marriage, God's Word says to consider the internal first. I would never suggest marrying someone you're not attracted too or have feelings for, but we must remember that those externals don't last. Metabolism slows down. Gravity takes over. You'll have bumps and bruises and bunions and wrinkles. Tattoos don't age well (if you have a tattoo of an ice cream cone someday it will look like it melted). Someday when you go to bed at night you might put your eyes and ears in a drawer and your teeth in a glass of water. 1 Therefore 1 Peter 3 says don't let your beauty merely be external, but of the inner heart. Proverbs 31: *"Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."*

The Bible says we are to consider in a potential spouse, their **spiritual condition first**. We are to **only marry someone who is in the Lord** (1 Cor. 7:39) – who we might say is born again and has a relationship with God. To marry outside the Lord is like yoking light with darkness and righteousness with unrighteousness (2 Cor. 6:14-16). It would be like trying to pull a plow using an ox and a horse. They are not equal height or strength and the plow won't plow right/straight

and result in frustration. As a kid I remember my dad telling a young friend and hired hand to stay away from the utility poles while tilling a field with his new 30-foot John Deere sweeps. My dad said he would do it later. Well, the young man didn't listen and hit a utility pole, causing a bend in the drawbar of the equipment. Since then, my dad always felt it was a touch out of whack and didn't pull straight.



If you're looking for someone to marry, I like the analogy of running hard after God with your eyes on Him and looking to the side occasionally to see if anyone is running as hard after God as you are. If they are, you might want to consider a date with them! If you're a fully surrendered believer and you marry a nominal Christian or carnal believer, who isn't surrendered to Christ's lordship, that'll cause problems. It's so important to be equally yoked. You need to marry someone who has the same Lord. **The closer a husband and wife are to the Lord, the closer they will be to each other:** emotionally, intellectually, financially, physically.

But think about this too: Adam knew Eve was perfect for him because **the Father designed her and brought her to him.** He said, *"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."* I always want to put an exclamation point there! He is excited! He thinks she's awesome! She completes him! He knows she is a perfect gift from God for him. One of the best parts of a wedding ceremony is watching those men receive that gift. It reminds me of Adam's reaction!

Your spouse is God's perfect gift to be received.

The first thing we do in a wedding ceremony is the **declaration of intent** in which just like Genesis 2, the bride father brings his daughter down the aisle. I ask if they will keep the charge God has given them to love their wives and respect their husbands before the men receive their bride. I also say, *"Will you receive them as the perfect gift of God, designed to make you more Christlike?"* In our Art of Marriage study, they talk about the myth of finding "the right one." How do you know if you've found the right one? Our world tends to operate by the idea that if we get married and things are smooth sailing, we've found the right one. If there's difficulties, we haven't found the right one and keep trying to find the one. I would say you know you've found the right one when you marry them. They are God's gift to you. And spouses have to trust God's sovereignty in that. However you happened to meet, God in His sovereignty, allowed you to meet. He brought you together and you are perfect for each other. That's also key to fighting temptation – you remember your spouse is perfect for you.

Receiving God's perfect gift also means **accepting the differences.** The differences between a husband and wife are great: backgrounds, personalities, temperaments, spiritual gifts, talents,

scars, feelings, ideas. Males and females think and speak and hear differently. The *Love & Respect* series teaches that one thinks in pink and the other in blue.^{vii} But this too, is by design.

Differences are by design.

A lot of folks get stuck on this, thinking we need to be exactly the same. We need to be equally united in the Lord, yes, but **unity does not mean uniformity** (1 Cor. 12:12-26). We weren't created exactly alike and for functional reasons. Don't waste your time trying to change each other because it won't happen (or happen successfully) because we are wired differently. Scripture says each spouse just needs to concentrate on doing their part to live out God's instruction and the Spirit of God will do the changing work in their spouse if and when they need it (1 Peter 3:1-2). If you remember differences are by design and a gift, it will make a world of difference!

In another message, we'll talk more about Adam and Eve's transparency and how important that is to experiencing oneness. But **oneness** is more than a business partnership. It is a lifelong process of **blending lives together**. When it's done God's way, makes a powerful statement to the world because communication, we know, is not just by lecture, but by life. It is by modeling. Teaching is not just taught, but caught, as we interact and observe others. Let me ask again, "*What picture is your marriage painting?*"

One man said recently, "*When marriages work as God intends, they act as magnets, drawing the disillusioned and confused to consider the reality of Christian faith.*"^{viii} And a good example of that was in Chip Ingram's book, *Marriage That Works*, where he said that he and his wife once had a next-door neighbor got to see the good, the bad and the ugly of their lives. This neighbor was not a believer, but their families interacted much. Just before she moved, she said, "*I've always been turned off by religion and I'm not sure if I believe in God. But over the years I've watched you and your wife. If I were ever going to be a Christian, I'd want to be one like you.*"^{ix} Chip said that she wasn't saying that because his marriage was perfect in any way, but that their marriage was a reflection of the Master Designer. They loved each other through life's ups and downs, and she saw a commitment that made an impression about her understanding of the God.

I would challenge you to strengthen the oneness of your marriage this week by asking your spouse how you can be praying for them. And pray together! Praying from the heart for our spouse and hearing our spouse pray for us draws us together in oneness in that most important spiritual level.

ⁱ Timothy Keller, *The Dance of God*, 8-9.

ⁱⁱ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, 226.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tim LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 25.

^{iv} The Art of Marriage, Session 1: *Love Happens*.

^v Chuck Swindoll, *Strike the Original Match*, 30.

^{vi} <https://answersingenesis.org/human-body/the-amazing-regenerating-rib/>

^{vii} Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* series.

^{viii} Allistair Begg, *Lasting Love*.

^{ix} Chip Ingram, *Marriage That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 18.