

Marriage Story: Connecting your Marriage to God's Story

"The Glory of Marriage"

Session 1

I. The Purpose of Marriage

A. The "how" vs. the "why"

Historically people have answered the "why" question differently. That is, couples have married for differing reasons, which are often culturally defined.

Reasons for marriage:

- To create political or tribal alignments
- To maintain or raise one's cultural status
- To honor parental wishes- arranged marriages
- To create a legitimate family to perpetuate the lineage and sustain economic viability.
- To legitimize sexual relations
- For family stability/societal order
- For romantic love
- To join with one's soulmate
- For personal fulfillment- to be whole and happy

B. God's purpose for marriage

1. The storyline of the Bible

- a. Creation
- b. Fall
- c. Redemption
- d. Consummation/restoration

2. Simplified Storyline: "Ought-Is-Can-Will"

- a. Creation- The way life ought to be.

- b. Fall- The way life is.
- c. Redemption- The way life can be.
- d. Consummation- The way life will be.

3. Marriage in God's story

As we read through the story of the Bible, we see how marriage intersects with each of these stages of redemptive history. In creation, we find God originates marriage by joining the man and woman in an exclusive one-flesh union. In the fall, sin corrupts not only our relationship with God but also with one another. Sin touches every aspect of our marriages. Through redemption in Christ, we receive new life and the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can live out our marriages displaying the gospel. At the consummation, we will not be married, but we will experience the fullness of the glory to which our marriages point. The purpose of marriage is tied to the purpose of God for all creation- to gather a people for his glory. This grand purpose culminates in the joining of his Son and his bride (the church).

“The first cosmos was created as the home of a young couple named Adam and Eve. The new cosmos will be created as the eternal home of the Son and his bride. It is not as though marriage is just one theme among others in the Bible. Instead, marriage is the wraparound concept for the entire Bible, within which the other themes find their places. And if the Bible is telling a story of married romance, no wonder that the demonic powers would forbid marriage (1 Tim. 4:1–5). Every happy marriage whispers their doom and proclaims Christ's triumph.” (Ray Ortlund, Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel, p. 16)

II. Marriage in Paradise

Genesis 1-2 portrays marriage as it ought to be.

A. God creates marriage

- 1. All that God created is very good (Genesis 1:31).
- 2. Within the “very good” creation, something is “not good.”

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone...” (Genesis 2:18)

Even in paradise, it is “not good” for Adam to be alone because he is created in the image of God as a relational being (Genesis 1:26). Like the triune God, humans are created with a capacity to love. God designs one relationship to be the most intimate, loving, unifying relationship in all creation- the marriage between a man and a woman.

3. Companionship is at the heart of the marriage relationship.

- a. Marriage is God’s answer to Adam’s “not good” state of aloneness.

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”
(Genesis 2:18)

A one-word description of God’s provision is companionship. A companion is a “mate or match for something.” Adam’s companion, Eve, is a “suitable helper” with which he is united in a one flesh relationship. The term “fit” indicates that she “corresponds” to him. Thus, Eve is the companion to complement Adam in all of life. If we begin with God’s stated reason for creating Eve and joining her to Adam in marriage, then we will naturally conclude that a fundamental purpose of marriage is companionship.

“Companionship is presented in Eden as a primary human need, which God proceeded to meet by creating not Adam’s duplicate but his opposite and complement, and by uniting the two, male and female, in perfect personal harmony.”
(Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary, p. 38)

- b. Covenant of companionship

The word “companionship” is not used in Genesis, but it is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe marriage.

In Malachi 2:14, God rebukes a group of Jewish husbands for dissolving their marriages: “Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

“Marriage really is a human covenant of companionship. God wasn’t so much giving Adam a physical helper for the

work in the garden as he was giving him a companion. God knew that he had created a social being, and because of Adam's social hardwiring, it was not good for him to live without the companionship of one made from him and made like him. You could argue that this is the most basic reason for marriage. God created a life-long companion for Adam, and his relationship with Eve would exist on earth as a visible reminder of God's love relationship with people and as the God-ordained means by which the earth would be populated as God designed." Paul Tripp, What Did You Expect?, p. 145.)

B. Marriage is a unique and exclusive companionship

1. God makes Adam aware of his need for a companion (Genesis 2:19-20).
2. God makes Eve from Adam and brings her to him (Genesis 2:21-22).

God creates Adam from the dirt, and he creates Eve from Adam's side demonstrating the unique closeness, connection, and union the couple is to enjoy. God brings her to Adam, and we read the first poetic expression in the Bible, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh..." (v. 23)

3. God declares the exclusive nature of Adam and Eve's companionship (Genesis 2:24-25).

The marriage takes priority over the relationship with parents (a radical idea in the time of the first readers). Man is to leave his parents and hold fast or cleave (bond or unite) to his wife becoming one with her. This one flesh relationship includes sexual union, but the phrase speaks to something much broader. God unites them in a bond that creates a new entity (marriage), so now they share one life together without losing their individual persons. Jesus will later say that this bond is fixed permanently and should not be separated.

4. God's purpose for marriage is revealed in the first couple's perfect companionship (Genesis 2:25).

Prior to the fall, companionship was natural. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not afraid." (Genesis 2:25) There is

no fear or shame because there is no sin. They know an openness, transparency, freedom, and intimacy that we can't even imagine.

From creation, it is clear that God designed marriage as a covenant of companionship to be lived out beautifully in a one flesh complementarity.

III. Our Marriage and God's story

A. The importance of understanding the "why" of marriage.

We often start by identifying challenges in our marriage or evaluating our roles in marriage without first asking about God's created purpose for marriage. You may not have given a lot of thought to the purpose of your marriage. If not, go back and read Genesis 1-2 and write down what you learn about God's plan for marriage. This session has only scratched the surface.

Some of us may have thought deeply about the purpose of our marriage, yet as we reconsider the subject, we find that we have drifted in our vision for our own marriage. Marital drift is often subtle and unnoticeable. If we don't meaningfully revisit the biblical "why" for our marriage, we may find ourselves coasting along and taking each other for granted rather than purposely growing in our covenant companionship. Sadly, some couples don't realize the drift until their nest is empty, and they are left alone together.

B. Husbands and companionship

Is your wife feeling the warmth of your companionship? You should ask her. We are to take initiative and responsibility for ensuring our wives are not feeling relationally isolated or distanced from us. For many of us, it is easy to live on autopilot and engage only when she raises her need. God calls us to cultivate a deepening friendship, spiritual fellowship, and whole life companionship with our wives.

"In marrying, a man joins himself to his wife at a profound level. He does not ask her to move his way, to do all the adjusting toward him. But he takes the initiative to move toward his wife, enfolding her into his heart, bonding with her as with no other human being, not even his children. He rejoices to identify with his wife, as Adam did with Eve: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.' At every level of his being, a husband should be wholeheartedly devoted to his wife, loyal to his wife, steadfast toward his wife, as toward no other." (Ortlund, p. 30)

C. Wives and companionship

Is your husband experiencing your loving devotion, spiritual fellowship, and whole life companionship? Many wives seem to be hardwired for companionship more than their husbands. Yet often rather than relating as a “helper fit for him,” a wife may miss the companionship target assuming his relational preferences or needs are identical to hers. How can you cultivate companionship with him in a way that he desires? You should ask him.

D. God’s good purpose for our marital companionship

Regardless of where we find ourselves at this moment, we need to know that God has a good plan for each of our marriages. We haven’t yet discussed what is wrong with our marriages (that’s next session), but we all know that marriage the way it ought to be (Genesis 2) is not the way marriage is. There is good news ahead. The gospel tells us that God’s forgiveness and power are gifts to move us into a deeper one flesh companionship. God’s story is not yet complete, and neither is yours!

Discussion questions

1. Describe to your spouse what you think a “covenant of companionship” should look like in your marriage. Are your expectations in sync? If not, what steps can you take to unify your vision for your marriage?
2. Identify a couple of ways in which you experience fruitful companionship as a couple.
3. Ask your spouse if there are ways in which he or she feels disconnected or alone in your marriage. Ask how you can be a better companion in those areas.
4. What things are currently competing with your priority to cultivate your companionship? What changes can you make in your life together to cultivate your companionship?
5. Read Genesis 2:24-25. What do you think it means for a married couple to be “one flesh”? What is the significance of Adam and Eve being “naked” and “not ashamed”? How do these verses speak to you and your marriage?