



3 The Ideal Marriage

The following excerpts are taken from parts 3&4 of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full message is available on FoodForYourSoul.net

God's Ideal

When Jesus was asked about divorce and He quoted from the first two chapters of the Bible, which never even mention divorce. Jesus pointed us there for answers about divorce because the pre-fall marriage is God's ideal and is therefore the starting place for any topic regarding marriage. The problems with marriage were caused by the fall and the curse, and the solution to marital problems is to reverse the effects of the curse through the gospel. In Genesis we learn 5 components of God's ideal for marriage.

It is not good for man to be alone

1) Companionship

After the repetition of the statement "it is good" throughout the creation account comes the shocking contrast after the creation of man: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gn.2:18). The word translated "alone" refers to "a solitary, desolate, sad, afflicted condition." And God's solution to that was the creation of Eve. Marriage is designed by God to be a companionship (Pr.2:17). There is a depth of companionship that can exist in marriage that is unmatched even by the best of friends. And therefore it is a travesty for a married person to be lonely.

Christ our Companion

Marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church and the Lord Jesus Christ is our closest friend (Jas.2:23, Jn.15:14-15). That is part of the gospel, and our marriages are walking gospel-proclamations. Loneliness in marriage, then, proclaims a kind of false gospel.

So if you are married and still lonely, what should you do? Is the solution to simply find companionship and full satisfaction in God alone? No. Adam had access to fellowship with God and yet God still said it was not a good situation until he had the woman. God is the only source of living water, the only source of joy, the only source of satisfaction and delight, but He wants you to experience that joy and satisfaction and delight *through* your spouse.

Joy comes from loving, not being loved

But what if your spouse isn't doing a very good job loving you? It doesn't matter. Finding the solution to loneliness is not held hostage by your spouse failing to love you. When Eve first appeared, Adam responded with great delight – an exclamation of perfect Hebrew poetry in Gn.2:23 "This is now bone of my bone..." Adam's problem was solved not by Eve delighting in him, but by his delight in Eve. The joy will come for you not when your spouse starts loving you more but when you start loving your spouse more. A steak dinner is enjoyable only if you love steak. And spending an hour with your spouse will be enjoyable only if you deeply desire him/her and take great delight in him/her. It is loving, not being loved that brings the joy. (If someone you can't stand has a crush on you, that doesn't bring you joy.) Not even God's love is enjoyable to people who don't love God. But when there is someone you deeply love – just being in that person's presence is enough to fill you with joy even if they are not doing anything. All they have to do is just be themselves and it brings you joy. There are many ways to increase our joy, but the greatest of all is by loving people because God loves them. (Jn.15:11-12, Gal.4:14-15, Ps.16:2-3)

Duty or Delight?

Just as God hates it when we serve Him with an attitude that says, "What a burden this is" (Mal.1:12-13), so it dishonors and demeans our spouses when we show kindness to them in a way that is burdensome to us. Never allow your love to degenerate into mere duty. If what you are doing in your marriage is not blessedness for you then it is not love. And if you want to increase your blessedness you will do so not by getting your spouse to change or love you more, but by loving your spouse more (esteeming them more highly, desiring them more intensely, and delighting in them more thoroughly).

When Paul describes the time when the Galatians used to love him, and they took care of him when he was very needy, it was not burdensome to them at all. But that changed. And when it changed Paul did not say, "What happened to your love?" He said, "What happened to your *blessedness*?" (The word "blessedness" means "occasion for joy"). Love is blessedness. It makes you happy.

The bottom line: *If you are married and lonely, the only solution for your loneliness is for you to experience the grace of God through your spouse by delighting in your spouse.*

What terrific news! If the solution to your loneliness were your spouse loving you, then it would be outside your control. If he/she didn't change you would just be out of luck. You could try nagging and complaining, or trying to manipulate

your spouse into loving you better, but all that would do is make it harder for them to love you. The solution to your loneliness problem would be out of your hands. But since the solution is in your loving your spouse, it is something you can do even if your spouse never changes at all.

Partnership

When God created the first wife He summarized her role in two words: "suitable helper." (Gn.2:18) But what kind of helper? A servant? A maid? Or is it some other kind of help? We think of a helper as an assistant – or a secretary or errand boy. None of that comes anywhere close to the idea of this Hebrew term. The term literally means, *providing relief or aid, as one who helps the miserable and destitute.* This word is never used in the sense of assisting to make a task *easier*. It is always used of assisting in order to make a task *possible*. Without the helper, the task cannot be done at all.

Normally this word is not used to describe human beings. In the Bible the singular is always used of God (over 100 times), except for here where it is used of the woman. It is the word in Psalm 121 - **I lift my eyes up to the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from You...**

So Moses takes a word that is normally only used to describe God and applies it to Eve. Implication: Eve is the very help of God. "Where does my help come from? My help comes from God, and her name is Eve." Adam needed a someone to rescue him, to come along and make what was an impossible task possible. Solution: Eve.

A married couple is not 2 people fulfilling 2 callings under 1 roof. It is 2 people fulfilling 1 calling. Your calling is complex. It involves your ministry at church, family, friends, work, personal life – everything God wants you to do. And unless you are called to singleness you need a spouse to accomplish your calling. So the ideal marriage is not only a companionship, but also a partnership. Husbands and wives have different roles, but not different callings. The couple has one, single calling that requires both of them as a team to accomplish.

Suitable

The word translated **suitable** literally means "corresponding to what was in front of him." There was a task sitting there in front of Adam that Adam could not accomplish. So God came to his rescue with one who was suitable, corresponding to the accomplishment of Adam's task. But God did not provide this suitable rescuer right away. He first made a point of showing that none of the animals would qualify (v.20) It had to be someone in the image of God. Nor would another man do. It had to be someone very different – a compliment rather than a duplication. And from that we learn that the differences between male and female are crucial for the combined ability needed to carry out God's calling. (Don't get frustrated because your spouse is so different from you. If he/she were not different you would be unable to fulfill your task as a couple.)

Partnership with God

Is partnership aspect of marriage a picture of the relationship between God and His people? Yes. There is no sense in which we are God's helpers, but we do work with Him. God is almighty and in need of nothing. We are specks of dust. Yet He stoops to make us partners with Him in his work! And the partnership is so profound that you cannot even make a clear distinction between what we are doing and what He is doing.

Colossians 1:29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Paul's ministry was God's doing and it was Paul's doing. It was not half Paul and half God. It was Paul's labor, God's energy, and God's powerful working – but through Paul.

A husband and wife, then, who are off in two different directions doing two different things and there is no partnership in what they are doing, are living a lie about God's relationship with His people.

When people look at the work being accomplished for the kingdom through your marriage it should not be all that clear where you end and your spouse begins. We should be intermingled and entwined like God and Paul in the verse above. It is not the man's place to take over the wife's roles in the home, but it is his privilege and joy to supply her with strength, encouragement, leadership, and protection in all she does. She must carry out her role, but as she does so she will face an enemy who will strive to hinder her, and so her husband must fulfill all that Scripture means by headship in order to give her the courage, strength, motivation, knowledge, confidence, and rest as the main human tool God uses to empower her.

And wives, you may not have the slightest understanding of what your husband does all day at work, but you can still encourage, support, and honor him. A man who has that kind of support from his wife can accomplish ten times what he could do otherwise.

This is another area where we need to protect each other from temptation. If you are not your spouse's greatest encourager and supporter, then someone else will eventually come along and fulfill that role and it is going to be really hard for your spouse not to be attracted to that person. If a man comes home and just gets yelled at, argued with, belittled, dumped on, or treated like a child, and then he goes to work and some woman there is deeply impressed with him and has high respect for him and encourages him, you have just placed him into a position of great vulnerability to temptation. And men, if you are not tender and compassionate and understanding and interested in what your wife has to say, it will not be long before Satan sends some other guy along who will do all that.

3. Priority (Covenant)

Gn.2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother

Adam and Eve did not leave their parents – they didn't even have parents. And yet the fact that 1) the first relationship God ever created was a husband-wife relationship (vv.21-22), and 2) it was a relationship of unparalleled oneness and union (v.23), the implication is that a man should leave father and mother when he gets married (v.24). The marriage relationship is to be a priority even over the parent-child relationship (which means it is a priority over every human relationship, because the parent-child relationship is the closest natural relationship there is). This "leaving" refers not mainly to geographical leaving as much as a shift in priorities.

God's ideal for marriage is for you to be more devoted to your spouse than to anyone else. When a man listens to his mother more than he listens to his wife, that is a violation of God's plan for marriage. When a woman starts being more responsive to her boss, father, pastor, or anyone else than to her husband, that is not God's ideal. The highest commitment of your life must be your spouse. It is not a good idea to be spending hours on the phone with your parents right after you get married –and your wife does not need to hear about how amazing your mother's lasagna is.

Highest priority

Marriage is not just the highest relationship, but the highest earthly priority period. Your wife is more important than your job. Your husband is more important than your children or anything else in your life besides God Himself. That is God's ideal. Is your spouse your highest earthly priority? And if so, is that obvious to your spouse? Strive to communicate your commitment to him/her that spells "priority" in his/her way of thinking. Ask your spouse, "Does it seem like there is anything in my life that I put ahead of you as a priority (besides God)?" (And do not get upset if you get an honest answer!)

Covenant commitment with God

Marriage is a covenant, not a contract. (Pr.2:17) It's not a mere promise or commitment. And when that covenant is violated it brings dire consequences in one's relationship with God (Mal.2:14). A covenant is the most binding kind of commitment there is. In our culture the most binding commitment is a contract. But a covenant is stronger than a contract. Break a contract and you go to jail. But a covenant was sealed with one's very life.

It is crucial that marriage be treated as a covenant so we properly illustrate the covenant relationship between God and His people. His relationship with us is formulated in terms of covenant more than any other way in Scripture. Your faithfulness and commitment and obligation to your spouse is not just a matter of making your spouse happy. It is a matter of whether your marriage is going to tell the truth about God or lie about God.

4. Unity

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

United

To be united with your spouse refers to a closeness that makes your heart easily influenced by the other person's heart (1 Ki.11:2-4). It is also an emotional term. In Gn.34:3 it is used of tender, romantic speech that touches the heart. God's ideal for marriage is for a man and woman to be joined at the heart in loving commitment such that each is easily influenced by the other because of the profound oneness.

One flesh

What really captivates Adam's affections when he first sees Eve is the fact that she came out of him (Gn.2:21-23). Man was formed from the dust, but woman from flesh. God didn't make her out of dust, because He wanted to demonstrate the profound unity in marriage.

Jesus said even a couple that is on the verge of getting a divorce is still one flesh (Mt.19:4-6). Therefore every married couple is one flesh regardless of the state of their relationship. One flesh is a legal status in the eyes of God that applies regardless of how much love exists in the marriage. However in practice we need to strive to live up to our position. If we drift apart in our goals, interests, finances, work, ministry, etc. we become a living contradiction to God's purposes in marriage.

One with Christ

Why did God make marriage a one flesh relationship? Once again – to illustrate the relationship between God and His people (Eph.5:28-32). If you are a believer Jesus Christ feeds and cares for you because you are one of His body parts (v.29). As a believer you are as close to God as your arm or leg is to you. There is no language to communicate a closer union.

Everything that is His is yours. All His riches, His house, His kingdom, His family, His wisdom, His heaven, His creation - all yours. His angels are at your disposal. He who didn't spare His own Son will certainly give you all things (Ro.8:32)

And everything you have is His. All your sorrow, fears, anxiety, worry – He will take it all. Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you. Even your sin and your punishment He bore on His body on the tree. Everything that belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ belongs to you, because you are one with Him.

He is inside you – touching you in places so deep you don't even know about them - moving your most hidden motives and your feelings, passions, resolve, and attitudes. And you are inside Him – living in a cocoon of His thoughts and His grace and desires and love and will. Every square inch of your life is touched by Him inside and out.

That is what the Lord Jesus Christ does with His people. And He wanted us to understand something about that, and so when He created humanity He created one special relationship designed to reflect that truth: marriage.

This is probably the main reason for sex. Producing children is secondary (never even mentioned in the Song of Solomon.) Sex is the most profound act of human oneness (1 Cor.6:16-17) and it serves to illustrate the way Christ is related to His people.

For your marriage to fulfill its purpose for existence there must be a oneness and unity between you and your spouse that is unparalleled in any other kind of relationship in the world.

5. Intimacy

Gn.2:25 The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.

This goes beyond mere physical exposure. Adam and Eve were completely open and exposed to one another in every way without any self-consciousness, embarrassment, concern about protecting themselves or having their guard up or having anything to hide. Unthreatened intimacy.

It requires a unique kind of relationship where you can be at your most vulnerable and still be completely at rest and comfortable with someone else. A person who does not know you and rejects you does not really hurt you much, but if the person who sees the real you and rejects you - that really hurts. The more you open yourself up to someone, the more potential they have to hurt you, and so we develop protective layers. And we do not really "let our hair down" unless we are in the company of people we trust. Those protective layers protect us, but they also block intimacy.

But God made one particular human relationship where you can be naked and unashamed – without the need for protective layers so intimacy is unhindered. Your spouse knows all about you and sees all your weaknesses, ugliness, faults, and inadequacies – far more than anyone else – and yet loves you more than anyone else loves you.

Unashamed before God

Why did God make marriage like that? Again, to reflect His relationship with us. Amazing! The norm for a Christian's relationship with God is naked and unashamed! The naked part doesn't surprise anyone. We all know that God can see our hearts. But *unashamed*? Is that the way you think of yourself before God most of the time – unashamed? For many Christians that is inconceivable. They have almost no other posture before God than shame. But that is not what God wants. When we sin we should feel shame (Ps.51:1-2), but not permanently. The whole purpose of repentance is to be restored. And when God restores you your shame turns to joy and rejoicing (Ps.51:8,12). The crushing guilt should give way to joy and rejoicing.