

Vision for Marriage

Reading & Sharing

Please share any revelations or breakthroughs you had with the four faces of manhood (lion, ox, man, or eagle) this week.

This topic covers one of the main relationships for most men, their marriage partnership.

Just as we need a vision, or mental model, for manhood, we also need a vision for how marriages should work.

Purpose of Marriage

There are several reasons as to why God gave us marriage.

- To grow and mature us
- To reveal truth to us
- To have and bring up children
- To protect us from sexual sin

Growth/Maturing

Marriage matures us and forces us to think of others before ourselves.

Marriages should get better with age! Just like physical fitness, this takes effort and time.

God asks us to submit to each other, and it takes maturity to do that. Wives have their husband as their head, or leader – but husbands must love their wives sacrificially too.

Submission comes first to one another and is not solely for the wife to submit to the husband. For a husband submission comes through self-sacrifice. All of us are called to submit to each other and to God.

Can you describe an occasion when you've witnessed a good example of submission in marriage?

Revealing Truth

God uses marriage concepts to teach us truth.

It speaks of the relational nature of the trinity and that union with God is what we're missing in this fallen world.

It also shows us how the Church (the bride) should relate to Jesus (the bridegroom).

Children/Procreation

Not every married couple will have children, for many infertility robs them of the chance to experience the joy of parenthood, some others will avoid it for other reasons.

But children are a blessing and a gift from God that we are expected to desire, and that marriage brings us. They also grow and mature us.

Protection from Sexual Sin

God has told us to place our expression of sexuality inside the bounds of a covenant agreement, which is marriage.

Marriage alone does not protect us fully against sexual sin, but it does give us a godly and sanctified way to express our sexuality.

We will deal further with sexual purity in another topic.

Marriage is for Life

The Bible tells us that marriage is for life, and in the New Testament it is held as being between one man and one woman.

Marriage is not forever, in heaven there is no difference between male and female.

Usually marriages end when one partner dies, but in our society they can also end when we divorce. What does the Bible say about divorce?

Jesus teaches us not to divorce and the Old Testament took a similar view.

Exceptions were made for:

- If the spouse has committed 'sexual immorality', divorce is allowed (but not required).
- If the spouse is an unbeliever and they initiate the divorce.

If there is physical or emotional abuse, it may also be advisable, as the safety of each partner is of primary importance.

Separation for a short time is a choice that can work for some marriages in crisis, but only if both partners commit to change. This allows partners some time apart to find themselves with God and then slowly re-build trust between each other. This has worked for many Christians who have made mistakes in their marriages, but it should be used carefully.

However, the main point here is that marriage should not be rushed into, and should not be discarded easily. It is a sacred covenant that helps us follow God's will for our lives.

Your Wife, a Helper and Co-Heir

What is the role of a wife in marriage?

One biblical answer is that she is the husband's helper, as that is what God called Eve for Adam.

Fortunately, we know that being a helper is not just being an assistant or servant.

We have examples of God and the Holy Spirit especially being described as our helper – and He is not our servant or assistant!

To be a helper you must have the power to help.

Wives are also our co-heirs with Christ, adopted as children of God and therefore equal with us.

As our co-heirs we must respect that they have an equal relationship to God, and an equal inheritance. So of course, your wife is deserving of your respect and consideration.

How does your wife act as your helper, and how do you show appreciation for that?

Of One Flesh

The Bible tells us that a husband and wife are of one flesh, in union with each other.

We are equal heirs with Christ, which means we can't treat women as inferior and less equal members of society.

Sometimes men embrace equality without considering the unity of marriage. They almost take a viewpoint *outside* their marriage and ask whether their wife is behaving equally to them.

But this causes us to judge and thus condemn our wives, when we are called to encourage and elevate them.

By taking the attitude that we are “one flesh”, that we are part of an indivisible union like the trinity, we can change our behavior and be a blessing to our wives and not a source of judgement to them.

We are called to understand our wives, to listen and empathize with them, so that we may help them – and they are called to do the same for us.

One great reason to be considerate to our wives, as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:7 is that if we treat them with respect then “nothing will hinder your prayers”, which surely is a good thing!

What are some ways we can respect and be considerate to our wives?

Discussion Starters

What surprised you about the purposes of marriage mentioned this week?

If you're single, how does this vision of marriage challenge you?

At Home Work

There is some work for you to do before the next meeting:

- Read and meditate on the scripture references for this week.
- If married, pray daily and ask God to show you what he wants you to improve in your marriage.
If divorced, pray daily and ask God to heal you, and ask what you could improve about yourself.
If single, pray daily and ask God to show you how you can get ready for marriage.

Prayer

At the end of each topic we leave a space for prayer. It is important to remember that we are asking God to show us what we should do with this truth.

Discover More

There are some great books on Christian marriage to help you dig more into God's vision for marriage. For example...

- The Power of a Praying Husband, Stormy O'Martian
- Love & Respect, Dr Emerson Eggerichs

Scripture References

Purpose of Marriage

Growth/Maturing

When Paul in Ephesians speaks of wives and husbands, it shows Christ's love for us as a pattern for us to follow:

EPHESIANS 5:21-33 *New International Version (NIV)*

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Revealing Truth

Marriage is an earthly relationship that reveals the relational union of the trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three persons in one indivisible nature. Each person of the trinity exists in equal and eternal relation with the others, inseparable with unity and fidelity as key characteristics, yet they have distinct roles, responsibilities and persons. In the same way when a husband and wife are joined together, they “become one flesh” and this is an example of us of the unity and fidelity in the trinity.

It is worth noting that the Bible builds the idea of marriage, from when Adam and Eve were given to each other by God, to when their children married each other, to ancient times when many wives were common for rich men, and finally in the New Testament to have just one wife.

PROVERBS 18:22 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

Children/Procreation

GENESIS 1:28 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’

PSALM 127:3-5 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

MALACHI 2:15 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

Protection from Sexual Sin

While the New Testament does teach us that the gift of celibacy is worthy (Matthew 19:9-12) it is also clear that if you do not have this gift then you should seek marriage to give your sexuality a righteous expression.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-9 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Marriage is for Life

Our society allows us to divorce, but what does the Bible say about it?

Jesus teaches us not to divorce:

MATTHEW 5:31-32 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

'It has been said, "Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce." But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

LUKE 16:18 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

MARK 10:2-12 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'

'What did Moses command you?' he replied.

They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'

‘It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,’ Jesus replied. ‘But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female”. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’

The Old Testament takes a similar view.

MALACHI 2:16 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

‘The man who hates and divorces his wife,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘does violence to the one he should protect,’ says the Lord Almighty.

So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

There are some exceptions made.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-16 *New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): a wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Your Wife, a Helper and Co-Heir

GENESIS 2:18-24 *New International Version (NIV)*

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

PSALM 33:20 *New International Version (NIV)*

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

PSALM 27:9 *New International Version (NIV)*

Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.

That last example shows that we are His servant, and yet he is our helper. To be able to help someone means you have some power, gift or ability they lack – and in that way, our wives are truly our helpers. Clearly that doesn't mean they must earn less money than us, or have less responsibility or be regarded as less able.

1 PETER 3:7 *New International Version (NIV)*

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

When it says “weaker partner” it is worth noting that there are real physical differences between men and women, one of which is that men are notably stronger in general, and particularly in the upper body than women. These differences are apparent when considering entire populations of people, but may not be apparent in individuals (slightly built men and strongly built women for instance).

The point is that husbands are to be considerate of their wives, respecting that they may be weaker and different in other ways than themselves, but also noting that they are heirs with us of the gift of life. This idea of us being co-heirs with Christ is developed further in the book of Romans:

ROMANS 8:12-17 *New International Version (NIV)*

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Of One Flesh

MATTHEW 7:1-5 *New International Version (NIV)*

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”
