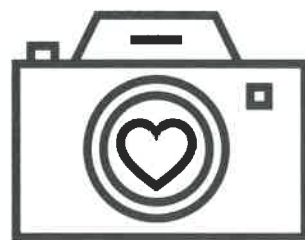




A PICTURE OF MARRIAGE

David Platt says, “The purpose of marriage is for the display of the gospel and a demonstration of the glory of our God.”¹



Our picture of marriage is broken. We know that marriage is meant to be a picture of the gospel, but sadly, many of the marriages that we see each day bear the marks of sin and brokenness. In our culture, marriage is seldom associated with selfless, redemptive love. And if marriage is distorted, so is the gospel. That is why now, perhaps more than ever, it is critical that we recover a biblical view of marriage.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Marriage is not a product of society. Marriage was God’s idea. He created it. From the very beginning, God’s Word clearly teaches God’s design for the union of man and woman. Scripture starts with a marriage as Adam and Eve are united as “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) and ends with a wedding feast as Jesus is joined to his bride (Rev. 19:6-10).²

Throughout history, from the garden of Eden to the marriage supper of the Lamb, marriage endures.

God’s ideal for marriage is the union of one man and one woman for one lifetime. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 19 saying,

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female,” and he also said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined 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.”

MATTHEW 19:4-6

Marriage doesn't begin with you and your happiness. Marriage begins with God. He gave us marriage. And we need to understand His plan.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Today, marriage is seen as unnecessary and optional. Culture argues that the desirable benefits of marriage (sex and companionship) can easily be obtained in other ways. “Marriage” is nothing more than a piece of paper, or worse a matter of convenience—something to stick with until it becomes a burden or until a better opportunity presents itself.

It is common for young people to see marriage and family as obstacles to personal goals and career advancement. Others embrace marriage as a means for emotional fulfillment, a cure for loneliness, or an outlet for romantic desire. But all of this underestimates the value and purpose of marriage.

Marriage doesn't begin with you and your happiness. Marriage begins with God. He gave us marriage. And we need to understand His plan.

A MARRIAGE BLUEPRINT

Let's begin with a definition. *Marriage* is a gift from God that reflects the gospel in our most intimate relationship in a way that demonstrates God's love and enables us to become more like Jesus.

We should always think of marriage as sacred, permanent, and exclusive. It is sacred because it is a gift of God. It is permanent because it is a covenant intended to last a lifetime. And it is exclusive because it

is limited in nature and expression to one man and one woman.

Marriage also has essential benefits. Through marriage, we experience intimate companionship within a lifelong covenant. Through marriage, we experience the biblical blueprint for sexual expression and fulfillment. Through marriage, a husband and wife may produce children.

In Genesis 1:28, the first command in Scripture, God said, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it ...” The sexual union of husband and wife is not only meant for pleasure, it is also the biblical means for the continuation of society. And because marriage was God's idea, it should not surprise us that it is uniquely suited for human flourishing. This can be seen in several rather obvious ways.

Consider that man and woman are designed to complement one another—both in anatomy and in terms of responsibility. Not only does the sexual union of man and woman result in offspring, but God also designed men and women to fulfill distinct roles in the family (e.g. protecting and nurturing). As a permanent union, the marriage covenant “brings stability to the relationship” and “provides a strong incentive to sacrifice, forgive, and seek the best interest of one's spouse.”³ Healthy marriages serve the physical and emotional needs of spouses and children, and reflect the goodness of the gospel.



THE WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST

Lifting up marriage as the foundation for human flourishing should not exclude non-married people or single parents from the conversation. Marriage is not only for the edification of the married couple. God gave us marriage to be a visible object lesson to teach us about who He is and who we are in relationship to Him.⁴

Through marriage, you model love, forgiveness, and service for the whole church body. Singles observe sacrificial love in the marriage relationship and see an image of our Savior who humbly gave Himself for us. Your children watch as you work out conflict with patience and faithfulness, and they come to better understand the long-suffering of God with us. For the single parent who is reading this, and reads that it is God's plan for children to have a mom and a dad who are joined together in a permanent, covenant relationship: You are not lessened in your singleness. No one "parents" alone. Sam Allberry said, "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a church to raise a Christian."⁵

"Mothering" is not only for mothers. It is the responsibility of every woman in the

church to be fruitful and multiply, not only biologically, but also spiritually. All of us are mothering and fathering, even if we're single, or married without kids. As people who are living together in community, your children have the distinct opportunity of having spiritual mothers and fathers in the church. Where you are weak, another may be strong. Where you lack courage, another may be brave. This is so much more than who is driving the carpool this week. We need spiritual mothers and fathers in the church because there is wisdom in many counselors.

Is there someone you need to reach out to in your church body? Are there men and women in your spiritual community who would gladly and humbly support you in your goal of Christ-centered parenting? Is there someone whom you need to come alongside? Do not be afraid, God expects His people to help and care for one another.

CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE

We have seen that marriage is meant to be complementary, exclusive, and permanent. We have seen that marriage is the foundation for human flourishing. But we could embrace all of these things and still miss the most significant thing about marriage. Marriage is meant to display the love of Christ for His bride, the church.

In Ephesians 5, Paul spelled out roles for husbands and wives and then looked back to Genesis 2 to say about the one-flesh union, "This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church" Our marriages reflect the gospel to an unbelieving world. When husbands love their wives "just as Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25) the

world sees a picture of a Savior who loved us so much He went to the cross for us. When wives submit joyfully in marriage, the world sees what it means to joyfully serve the Lord (Eph. 5:24).

We have a lot of broken pictures, making it much messier than God intended. But even so, “the unique relationship between man and woman joined together in marriage is the closest approximation we have of how much God loves us, and a picture of his plan to be with us forever.”⁶ This is why we must strive to faithfully embody the biblical picture of marriage—we must show the world a better picture of Jesus.

A GOSPEL LEGACY

God uses marriage to teach us many things. Marriage is permanent because God’s love for His people is never-ending. Marriage is exclusive because we are to put nothing else above or before God. Marriage is complementary because we are not self-sufficient, but Christ is sufficient for all our needs—He is the only One who satisfies our deepest longings. Every aspect of marriage was designed to illuminate the relationship between God and His people.⁷

Just because you have an imperfect marriage history does not mean you can’t present a biblical view of marriage to your kids. The Bible is full of sordid examples of imperfect families—Abraham the liar, Jacob the manipulator, David the adulterer and murderer, Rahab the prostitute (and great-great-grandmother of King David), and many others. God knows we make mistakes. He gave us feeble, human examples in Scripture so we would know we’re not alone. So whether you are enjoying a healthy

marriage, living as a single parent, or you are a child who has never experienced God’s design for families, there is hope and grace for you. More than anything else, marriage points us to the love and grace of God available to us in the gospel. Wherever you are in life, your imperfections don’t disqualify you from modeling the love of Christ as best you can.

Parents, we can’t just tell our kids what marriage is; we must live it out for them to see. You have the opportunity, no matter how imperfectly, to model repentance, forgiveness, unity, self-control, joy, giving, thankfulness, love, perseverance, and patience. Do your kids see genuine love between you and your spouse? Do they see the gospel in your marriage? Your child observes plenty of marriages on a daily basis. Let yours be the one he or she wants to model.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you have defined marriage before reading this article?
2. How has your view of marriage changed?
3. Is your marriage currently reflecting the gospel? Why or why not?
4. How are you mothering and fathering people in the body of Christ?
5. What one thing stood out to you from this article?