

Relationships: Part 1

What is Marriage

Relationships are vital to our existence as human beings. We are created to be relational, and find joy in sharing life with God and with others. There are different kinds and degrees to relationships. You can have close friends, family relationships, co-workers, or even casual acquaintances, and all these kinds of relationships fulfill some degree of connectivity in our lives. Marriage however, is a unique relationship unlike these others. According to our society, marriage is a legal status that entitles you to certain financial and social benefits. It's a legal formality on paper. Our society will also tell us its simply the most intense degree on the spectrum of relationships. But the truth is this, God designed marriage as means to communicate and reflect His love for humanity. Marriage is a picture of Gods relationship to His creation. It provides us with extreme intimacy, safety, encouragement, joy, growth, pleasure, spiritual growth, as a means to bring glory to God. The chief end of man, our main purpose on earth as humans, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. On way we accomplish this, is through marriage. It is the only relationship (or at least it should be) that has a "one flesh union." It is the picture of our union with Christ. It is the only human relationship that has no boundaries. And is a reflection of how Christ loves and leads his Church. Marriage is a beautiful gift, that is full of joy and pleasure but the truest foundational level of Christian marriage is that it should be something that reflects the glory of God, to the world.

Let's look at the text to understand what I mean by this.

Read Genesis 2:18-25:

There is a lot to unpack in these verses but first I want to start with the verses 24 and 25.

What do you think it means when it says one flesh?

What I believe the text is getting at is this; Adam and Eve (husband and wife) become one unit. There is a union between them that is inseparable and holy. There is no boundary, there is no distinguishable separation between them. There is no shame between them even though they are naked. In real life you can think of it as, there is nothing that keeps them from engaging one another. There is nothing too personal that the other person isn't allowed to see or be apart of. Real marriage is this: dropping a major deuce while having a casual conversation with your spouse who is literally 2 feet away brushing their teeth. No boundaries. For better or worse, life's most personal moments are shared with that one other person. Sex, sickness, joy, emotions, success, failures, hardships. There are no boundaries, because two have become one.

This is what makes marriage unique to any other relationship you have. Friendships, have boundaries. Even if you are super close to that person, there are lines that are not, or at least should not be crossed. Marriage is two people becoming one flesh, one unit. Think back to our identity book that we read a few months ago. When we become a follower of Christ, we become unified with Him. When we become believers, we take on His righteousness. When God looks at us, He sees Christ and not our sin. We become one with His righteousness. Unified. Do you remember that? Same idea. Husband and wife become unified, in that same way. You don't see two individuals, but one unit.

In your own words describe why marriage is unique to any other relationship you can have?

Marriage is awesome. An extreme intimacy that connects our relational core with another person. It can bring love, stability, growth, safety and all these other wonderful things to our lives. But even with all these things there is a deeper undercurrent that makes marriage special and meaningful, and I believe the reason we should view it as a holy activity.

Marriage at its core is the picture of God's relationship with man. In fancy theological words, John Piper calls marriage the "showcase of covenant-keeping grace." Simply, it is the illustration for Christ and His bride, the church. Now hang with me while I try to unpack this.

We read in Genesis, the very beginning of all things, God creates the world and tops it all off by making His prized possession, humans. Humans are invited into a relationship with their creator, to share and enjoy this world *with Him*. And the very first institution God ordains in this world is marriage. Now jump over to the end of History (which hasn't happened yet, Duh).

Read Revelation 21:9.

Context is always important. So spoiler alert...the bride is the church. This portion of scripture is talking about the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and earth, basically life after God has finally done away with sin and restores things to how they were supposed to be.

Who is the Lamb: _____

Who is His Bride: _____

At the end of the Story, Christ finally get His bride. Things are restored as they should be and the couple, Christ and the church, finally get to live happily ever after. In the beginning we see marriage and at the end we see marriage. The cap ends of humanities story begins and ends with marriage. Marriage is ultimately a picture of God's relationship to His people. It is Christ and the Church.

Christian marriages should be a picture to the rest of the world of 1) Christ's faithfulness, his covenant protection and cleansing of His bride and 2) the church as the picture of humanities response, in affirming and submitting to His Leadership with respect and gentleness.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33.

In your own words write out what are the roles of a husband and wife:

Husband: _____

Wife: _____

Marriage is a great responsibility and a gift. Through our relationships we get the honor and privilege of showing a picture of God to the world. But wait, I thought marriage was about love, emotional needs being met, and happiness? Are those things apart of marriage and a happy result of obedience to Christ? Yes. Is that the main point of marriage? Nope. It's not about you. Ever. I'm not saying that marriage doesn't come with some awesome blessings, it certainly does. But the good, that comes with marriage really only comes when we understand it in light of what God intended it to be. When we are obedient to His commands is when we can really live in the blessings He intends.

To understand marriage, we have to first understand our relationship with God. With any relationship and especially marriage, God must always be the center, the focus. God comes first in all things, no matter what. If your devotion and love for your spouse comes before your love and devotion to God, you have a problem. Marriage, if it really is the picture of Gods covenant with humanity, then you have a lifetime of humility and self-denial in your future. The only way you can sustain that kind of selfless love, is through a strong and intimate relationship with the Lord, above all else. Think of it this way...

You are a vending machine that has chips, all different kinds of chips. People love to come to you because they just have to push a button and they get a bag of chips. It is your joy to give these chips to people. In fact, it's what the manufacturer designed you to do. However, one day someone comes pushes the button, and they are sad to find that no chips come out. The chips just sit there in that little coil. The person pushes the button again, and then again and again. Finally, they give up and go away. What happened? Sometime in the night, the cleaning person moved you, the vending machine, and accidentally unplugged you from the wall. You have been cut off from electricity. No power = no chips.

This is the same in your marriage. You cannot continue to give grace, love, forgiveness to your spouse with out being plugged into God. You cannot continue to be the picture of Gods relationship to humanity, you cannot continue to live selflessly, in humility, seeking to forgive your spouse over and over for a life time, without the power of God. It's just a fact. If Christ is not the center of your marriage. If Christ is not first in your life, you have no power source and have no hope of living in obedience.

God endlessly gives to us this grace, forgiveness, covering for sin. When we put our faith in Him, we know He covers us and sees our sins no more. Continually for the rest of our lives God endures our sin, or stupidity, our mistakes etc. He doesn't shame us, or make us get what we deserve. He gives us grace. This is the model we have in how we are to treat our spouse. We look at what God has done for us, and we in turn extend that to our spouse. (ps, it's much easier said than done!)

Read: Colossians 3: 12-13: rewrite this in your own words.

We forgive, because God forgave us first. We show grace, because God gave us grace first. We love, because God loved us first. Yes, this rule can be applied to any and all of your relationships, but it is most

important in your marriage. Contrary to popular belief marriage doesn't bring out the best in your spouse, it brings the worst. With no boundaries, you get to see all sides of this person. The good, the bad, and the ugly. You get to see their sin up close and personal, in a way no other human being gets to experience. If you are not sustained, fulfilled, and connected to God above all else, then these encounters will crush you. You will not be able in your own strength to show grace, to forgive, again and again and again and again.

So, if Marriage, is this amazing responsibility, and a relationship unique to any other you will have in your life, how important is dating? What should dating look like? Why do you date? Who should we date? How important is sexual purity? This is what we will talk about next week.

Discussion questions:

- Is this concept of marriage new to you? How does this compare to what you thought marriage looked like before?
- How connected are you to God? Is God the center of all you do? How do you change that in preparation for marriage?
- Have you known or seen couples who live their marriage in this way? What benefits do you see from it?
- Have you known or seen couples who don't live their marriage this way? What problems do you see from it?
- Does this concept of marriage change your thoughts about how you should date? Why?