

# God's Design For Marriage & the Family

Lesson #	Date:	Topic:	Scripture:	Teacher:
<b>§ 1: God's Good Purposes For Marriage</b>				
1	Apr 12, 2026	God's Good Purposes For Marriage	<i>Genesis 2:18-25</i>	Tom
<b>§ 2: God's Good Pattern For Marriage</b>				
2	Apr 19, 2026	Reverence For Christ & Respect For God's Complimentary Design	<i>Ephesians 5:22 &amp; 25, Ephesians 5:21, I Peter 3:1, 7</i>	Tom
<b>A.) The Husband's Role: Sacrificial Leadership (Like Christ Loves the Church)</b>				
3	Apr 26, 2026	Part One: Jesus' Example	<i>Ephesians 5:25; John 13:1-7</i>	Alex
4	May 3, 2026	Part Two: The Husband's Calling)	<i>Ephesians 5:25-33</i>	Tom
<b>B.) The Wife's Role: Respectful Submission (Like the Church Loves Christ)</b>				
5	May 10, 2026	Part One: The Godly Woman's Picture	<i>Ephesians 5:22; Proverbs 31</i>	Tom
6	May 17, 2026	Part Two: The Wife's Calling	<i>Ephesians 5:22-24</i>	Tom
<b>C.) Marital Safeguards</b>				
7	May 24, 2026	1. Maintaining Healthy Boundaries	<i>I Tim. 5:2; Titus 2:4; I Thess. 4:1-8</i>	Tom
		2. Maintaining the Marriage Bed	<i>I Cor. 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4</i>	
		3. Maintaining Warm Friendship	<i>Proverbs 27:15-16; 15:1</i>	
<b>§ 3: God's Good Pattern For Parenting</b>				
8	May 31, 2026	Renewing Our Minds	<i>Ephesian 6:1-4; Romans 12:1-3</i>	Tom
9	June 7, 2026	The Parent's Calling	<i>Ephesians 6:1-4</i>	Tom
<b>§ 4: God's Abounding Grace For A Broken World</b>				
10	June 14, 2026	Marriage & Family Are Sometimes Messy: What About Less Than Ideal Situations? ( <i>Divorce, remarriage, blended families, unequally yoked, etc</i> )	<i>I Cor. 7:10-16; II Cor. 6:14; Matthew 1:1-17</i>	Alex

## Section 2: God's Good Pattern For Marriage (Part One)

### Lesson 2: Reverence For Christ & Respect For God's Complimentary Design

#### Review & Introduction

Last week, we began to consider God's good design for marriage. Together we saw that, according to Scripture: (1) *Marriage is good*, (2) *marriage is God's*, (3) *marriage is a blessing*, (4) *marriage is normative*, (5) *marriage is stabilizing for society*, (6) *marriage is singular (i.e. between one man and one woman)*, (7) *marriage is permanent (i.e. lifelong)*, (8) *marriage is intended to produce godly offspring*, (9) *marriage is an integral part of fulfilling the Great Commission*, and finally, that (10) *marriage is designed to be a picture of and preacher of the gospel*.

Of course, the Bible says more about marriage than merely these ten things, but this list gave us a good foundation from which to build. Today our goal is to *start* to look more specifically at the express calling of God for husbands and wives. We will delve deeper into this in the coming weeks. However, today, we want to begin to crack open that door together by looking at a few select verses of Scripture, but then, before we get in too deep, we will step back and carefully consider the real power for achieving that calling.

Many marriage classes, sermons, talks, books, etc. do a great job of accurately expressing the role of the husband and the role of the wife. *But where the teaching often falls short is in helpfully setting forth the real soul-sustaining source of motivation, perseverance, and power for a man or woman to faithfully strive after their God-given calling throughout the peaks and valleys of married life in a fallen world.* Instead, many people start out in the right direction, eagerly desiring to be the spouse God has called them to be. But then, when they face difficulties, they find that their resolve for continuing to be the husband or wife God has called them to be quickly dries up. When that happens, they tend to gradually revert back to old habits of *sin* and *selfishness* that ultimately sabotage the joy and success of their families.

I am happy to share with you this morning that there is, in fact, a deeper source of motivation, power, and perseverance for married life than our own will, our own flesh, our own feelings, or even our spouse's merits. ***That deeper foundation is the love of Christ for us first shown in the gospel, the wisdom of Christ set forth in his Word, and the reverence for Christ's will and ways that always grows out of a heart that has truly been redeemed.***

#### I. The Calling of God Upon Every Husband & Every Wife

First, we need to look soberly at the calling of God upon every husband and every wife. In order to do so, we need to turn off the noise of the world, and simply listen to the Word of God.

##### **Here is the calling of the wife as set forth in Ephesians 5:22-24:**

<sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* <sup>24</sup> *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

In brief, these verses teach us that wives are to submit to, trust, support, and follow their husband's leadership in the same way that the Church is called to do these things unto Christ. The wife's aim is not to have her way or to take charge, but to deploy all her graces and gifts in such a way as to effectively support, encourage, and strengthen her husband in the role of leadership that God has called him to take. In a very shorthand way, these verses begin to fill out a proper biblical definition of the title "*helpmate*" which we saw in Genesis 2.

We should not pretend like this calling is easy for the sinner's heart. *It is not.* This calling is, quite literally, the opposite of how the proud and self-absorbed heart is prone to live when it is being led by its own desires rather than the Word of God. But if you are beginning to think that wives have it especially tough, let's turn now and consider the calling of husbands.

### **Here is the calling of the husband as set forth in Ephesians 5:25-30:**

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body.*

In summary, the husband is called to lay down his life as a sacrifice of perpetual selfless service for the protection, provision, blessing, and, above all, spiritual edification of his wife. His leadership is never about gratifying his own pleasures, but rather about guarding and guiding those entrusted to his care unto the glory of God, and according to the example of Christ Jesus himself. *The husband's protection, attention, and devotion to his wife is to be equal to his protection of and devotion to "his own flesh," such that, he "cherishes her and nourishes" her as if her every need, her every pain, and her every sorrow were his very own.*

### **The Universal Struggle of All People To Maintain Our Commitment To This Calling**

**T**here is something palpably beautiful about God's design for marriage. But, if we are honest, it is easier to see and appreciate the beauty of God's design from afar, or to admire it on the pages of a book, or in the carefully edited scenes of a movie, than it is to actually embody it in our own practice amidst the real stresses and burdens of everyday life.

**Question:** *Without saying anything to dishonor your spouse, what are some of the challenges you experience in fulfilling your calling? When do you find it hardest to maintain your commitment to your calling, or to believe that God's design for you is actually what is best?*

#### **1. Our Personal Sin Makes Us Resistant To & Doubtful of the Wisdom of God's Design**

There are numerous personal struggles which can make it hard for us to fulfill God's calling for us as husband or wife—that is, our own sins, shortcoming, backgrounds, and temperaments. (We will address some of these in the coming weeks.) **But perhaps, above all other complicating factors is our own doubt and distrust of God.** In our sin, we are all prone to believe that if we actually give ourselves to the other as God has called us to—that is, if, as husbands, we lay down our lives in sacrificial service of our wife, and if, as wives, we submit ourselves wholly and joyfully to the leadership of our husband—that we might be taken advantage of, and that this might somehow lead us not to a fuller life, but to a lesser one. And so, rather than a posture of service toward the other, we adopt a posture of self-preserving defense, keeping records of wrongs, and always trying to make sure that our own interests are protected and obtained.

**Question:** *Can anyone speak to this experience? Have you experienced the fear of trusting God's design for you? The fear that if you give yourself to your spouse with the kind of selfless devotion that the Lord describes, that this will lead you to a lesser life?*

#### **2. The Sins of Our Spouse Make Us Resistant To & Doubtful of the Wisdom of God's Design**

On top of this, each new day husbands and wives give one another all sorts of fresh reasons to tell themselves that the other one is no longer worthy of the sacrifice to which Christ has called us. Wives can tell themselves that their husband is not competent, or not faithful, or not stepping up, or being heavy-handed, etc., and **therefore, she needs to step in and take the lead,** or at least, disregard her husband's input. When wives see the shortcomings of their husbands, there is no shortage of plausible arguments they can make in their minds in order to justify their reluctance to give their full devotion to God's design for them. In short, the sins of husbands make it harder for the wife to trust and obey God.

But, the same can be said for husbands, can't it? When a husband sees his wife taking advantage of his servanthood, or refusing to follow his lead, or always finding fault with everything he says or does, the husband, likewise, can *easily furnish himself with any number of plausible justifications for ceasing to strive after the good calling of God upon his life*. In other words, the sins of wives make it harder for the husband to trust and obey God as well.

### **A Destructive & Self-Strengthening Cycle**

***Worst of all, these patterns of sin feed one another.*** The more the wife pulls back her self-sacrificing devotion to the role which she has been called by God to take, the more the husband feels justified to do the same—and *vice versa*. *The marriage devolves into a tit for tat contract between two unhappy people who, instead of selflessly devoting themselves to the good of the other, are preoccupied with the daily chess match of fighting to maintain their own interests.* In many cases, even the “nice” things spouses do for one another become poisoned by ulterior motives which are ultimately aimed at securing personal desires. ***Beloved, when this sinful pattern is allowed to persist, it yields a compounding and destructive cycle that simultaneously: (1) erodes our confidence in the wisdom of God’s design for us, while also (2) reinforcing our perception that we are justified to throw off God’s design in favor of our own, self-protecting/self-serving models for married life.***

**Question:** *How does the world (and our own sinful nature) tell us to handle our spouse’s failures?*

**Question:** *What is the effect of this destructive cycle after two years, five years, ten years, and more? (i.e. the Erosion of waterfront park)*

**Question:** *How does this model for marriage impact children growing up under its example and influence?*

What can break this cycle? What can change our hearts and help us not only sincerely endeavor to practice God’s design for marriage, but to actually believe in the depths of our hearts—even when the going gets tough—that God’s design for marriage is the wisest and best design of all?

It seems evident, both by personal experience and by the testimony of many beloved saints I have known, that we need to learn afresh the true foundation upon which our calling as husband or wife is built, and by which our sustained devotion to that calling will be strengthened—even under fire.

## **II. The True Foundation For Fulfilling God’s Calling For Us As Husband or Wife**

### **The Love of Christ For His People**

**W**hen we think about the call to die to ourselves, whether as a wife or a husband, and to give ourselves away for the good of the other in our marriage, *and*, that we are called to do this for imperfect sinners—people who have let us down and hurt us, sometimes even very strongly—*where are we to look to see a model of this kind of selfless, sacrificial, and undeserved love?* The answer, beloved, is that we must look to Christ our Lord, and to the gospel of our own salvation.

The love that we have been called to display within our respective roles in marriage is modeled after the love we have first been shown in the gospel of our own salvation. *We were the spouse not worthy of the devotion of the other. We were the spouse who had failed to keep our side of the relationship, who had let the other down through disappointments, betrayals, and persistent sins of every kind. **Yet, our faithful husband, Jesus Christ, who had pledged his love to his Church from before the foundation of the world, did not fail to keep the vows of his covenant, nor to fulfill the calling of his office as the Great Bridegroom of the people of God.*** Even in the midst of our rebellion—*our covenant-breaking, our obstinance, our unthankful hearts and complaining spirits, even our spiritual adultery*—Christ our Savior laid down his life in sacrificial servanthood, dying to himself in order to do for us what we neither deserved from him, nor could have ever done for ourselves.

***In other words, Jesus did not determine the commitment of his love for you based on how well you were performing in the relationship. He loved you faithfully, according to the role given to him by the Father, even when you were unlovely. Our merciful Savior now calls us to do the same for our earthly spouse.***

*Beloved, the gospel of Jesus Christ not only shows us the kind of love we need for our own marriages, it also shows us the kind of confidence in the wisdom of God's design that we should have as we, like Christ, accept the unique role of husband or wife that God has assigned to us.*

## **1. The Love We Are Called To Display In Our Marriages**

**The love you have been called to show to your spouse is not based on the worthiness of your spouse.** It **MUST** be based on the gracious love of Christ which has first been shown to you—and which he continues to show you each new day! This is one of the great problems plaguing so many of our marriages: ***We think about our calling in marriage according to how deserving we perceive our spouse to be, rather than according to the love of God which has first been given to us. That is, rather than continually aiming to be faithful in marriage in response to God's perfect love, we justify our unfaithfulness in marriage by pointing to our spouses failures.***

With this kind of fallen and worldly perspective, it is no wonder that our commitment to our God-given roles as either husband or wife is often short-lived and unsustainable. *If the fuel driving our devotion in marriage is our spouse's deservedness, both we and they will quickly run out of gas because every spouse—even the very best—is a sinner who falls short everyday.* That approach to marriage only leads to the cycle of destruction that we described earlier.

***But if, on the other hand, the basis of our devotion in marriage is love to God for the love he has first shown to us in the gospel, then we will find that we have a ready and ample supply of reasons for faithfulness in our calling as husband or wife even on the worst days of our marital union, and even under the worst stresses of life.*** This is because, our devotion will no longer be tossed to and fro by the rising and falling of human performance and human affection. *Instead, it will be based on the everlasting, steady, persistent, and unchangeable love of God which is ours in the gospel of the Son.* To put it still another way:

***If the reason I am trying to love my spouse as God has called me to love them is because of his love for me in the gospel, then I will never be lacking the motivation I need to continue being faithful in that calling because Christ my Savior is ever-faithful and ever-worthy of my love.***

**Question:** *Who can explain back to us in their own words what we are learning here? Why is it so important that we adopt this perspective?*

*Dear ones, if we would be obedient to God and know the joy of married life as he has designed it, then we must let the love of Christ for us in the gospel be the controlling, defining, informing, empowering, and sustaining love that we endeavor to show to our spouse in marriage—regardless of their performance, their deservedness, or their reciprocation.* But Jesus' example in the gospel not only shows us **the love we are called to emulate**, but also **the trust in God's wisdom that we must pursue.**

## **The Wisdom of Christ In His Word**

**J**ust as we all have a propensity to reject God's call to love our spouse as we have been loved by God, so *we have a propensity to doubt and distrust God's wisdom in the specific dynamics of the role he has given to husbands and to wives.* In our modern world, even the basic, and self-evident truth that *men and women are made differently by God's design* is objectionable to many. *How much more objectionable is it then, that by God's design men are called to lead and women are called to submit?* This truth has fallen on hard times not only in the world at large, but even in the Church. But despite man's best attempts to invent a better plan than God's, he has been *embarrassingly unsuccessful.* God's ways are still the *wisest* and *best*, and it is for our *benefit* and *joy* that we endeavor to be conformed to the wisdom of the one who knit us together in our mother's womb, and who numbered our days before even one came to pass. Our Lord knows best how his Creation is to be ordered and to flourish.

Rather than beating around the bush, let's just go poke the elephant in the room in the eye and ask the question that almost always rises to the top of this discussion: ***Are women called to a lesser role because they are called to be the submissive helpmate of their husband?***

The world has given its verdict. It finds the complimentary design of God to be *oppressive, restrictive, degrading, and offensive*. It argues that “a woman can do anything a man can do—and usually better.” It declares that the notion of women being called to submission is *an archaic method of control from a pre-scientific age*. However, it does not always do this by a boisterous method.

Sometimes the rejection of God's design takes a *softer, subtler approach*. Instead of bluntly rejecting God's design, it borrows all kinds of psychological and therapeutic language in order to redefine the terms “*leadership*”, “*headship*”, and “*submission*” (etc.) so as to effectively render the uniqueness and authority of the roles indistinguishable. ***But, whether God's will is rejected loudly or softly, the plain fact is, neither of these approaches appreciates, trusts, or receives the wisdom of God for his people. The truth is, God has not designed the roles of marriage for the oppression of women, nor for the chauvinistic glory of men. Instead, he has given each role in order to visibly display the various facets of his own eternal glory, and to be a catalyst for the benefit, blessing, protection, and flourishing of the other spouse and the children they bring forth.***

**Question:** *What are some of the quieter and more subtle ways that God's design for wives is subverted?*

### **Is It True That Women Have a Lesser Role?**

It is true that women are called to “submit” to their husbands, (Eph. 5:22). It is also true that women are called the “weaker vessel,” (I Pet. 3:7). Moreover, women are even called the “helpmate” of man (Gen. 2:18), as if their whole existence is defined by their service to another. Many people instinctively assume that these titles are *degrading* and *derogatory*. But that is a great mistake, and one which needs to be corrected by the Word of God.

#### **1. Christ Is the Model of “Submission”**

First, let us consider the wife's call to submission. Is that really a derogatory and degrading position? Most women fail to realize that the place of submission is the place in which Jesus Christ willingly and joyfully lived before his Father (Jn. 4:34; 5:19; 6:38, etc.), and by that submission he not only accomplished the Father's will—i.e. our redemption!—but also more clearly and fully revealed the Father's glory. *Thus, when a woman is called to submission, she is not being called to a lesser role, but rather to a Christlike role through which it is her privilege and calling to beautifully display and demonstrate God's own glory as she humbly serves her husband.*

#### **2. Christ Is the Model of “Weakness”**

Second, let us consider the description of weakness. Was it not Christ himself who first took the place of weakness? He left his heavenly throne to put on the frailty of flesh in order to be the Servant and Savior of sinners. Why then do we think that the place of weakness is inherently less-than? God promises that it is ‘*in weakness that his power is made perfect*’ (II Cor. 12:9), and that he delights to ‘*use the weak to shame the strong,*’ and so humble them unto salvation, (I Cor. 1:27).

#### **3. God Himself Is the True & Great “Helper”**

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, God himself is called the “helper” throughout many passages of Scripture, (Ps. 54:4; 121:1; Jn. 14:26; etc.). *How then could it be a degrading title for women, when it is a title which reflects the care and devotion of God himself toward his people?* Moreover, to be a “helpmate” means that the one you are helping is lacking something without you—that is, that you have unique strengths, gifts, abilities, and talents which the other person will not enjoy unless you share them with him. Thus, once again, we see that this title also, *rather than degrading women, exalts them to a high and esteemed place in the economy of God's works. Far from oppressing women, God's design for them is that as they function according to the unique roles which he has assigned to them, they will be visible images of several unique aspects of his own glory in ways that men cannot be because they were not designed to be. The distinct*

roles for husband and for wife, as assigned by God himself, does not mean disparity in value, or purpose, or dignity, or honor. These roles are simply the different ways which God has designed us to bring honor to his name, and to bring flourishing to our families.

## The Real Form of Oppression Against Women

It is true that much harm has been done to women through improper male leadership. Wherever this has taken place, we must fiercely oppose it and hold men accountable for their dishonorable actions. But I want to suggest a different perspective for a moment. ***Have you ever stopped to consider that perhaps far more harm has been done to women by those who have told them that to be what God made them to be is bad? And therefore, through feminism, they have called women to resist God's design, to distrust God's wisdom, and to to break out of their "oppression" by trying to be something they were never designed to be. Dear ones, I would contend that this mindset, in any of its various forms, has done as much to oppress and mistreat women as chauvinism has ever done—if not more.***

Moreover, I want to illustrate just how destructive the refusal of God's wisdom for our lives really is. Imagine that I wanted to drive a nail into a piece of wood. The logical thing to do would be to use a hammer. Why? *Because that is what the hammer was designed to do.* Not only will it suit the work impeccably, but the hammer will not be damaged in the process because it is being used according to its design. But now imagine the same scenario, except, instead of grabbing a hammer, I try to use a toaster to drive the nail. It is still possible that I will get the job done, but what would happen to the toaster in the process? *It would become mangled and marred, potentially broken beyond repair.* Why is that the case? *Because it was being used contrary to its purpose, and whenever that happens, it always leads to destructive consequences.*

Dear ones, it is no different in our marriages. It is true that many women are capable of stepping into the role of leadership and accomplishing the work. But it is also true that doing so means those women are deploying themselves *contrary to their calling* and *contrary to their design.* This will not only bring harm to them, but it will also bring harm to their marriages, to their children, and to society as a whole. The same is true for men who refuse to step up and lead as God has called them to. When men abdicate their God-given privilege, responsibility, and duty to be the servant-leader of their family, it will always bring devastating consequences into the marriage, into the family, and into the world. Beloved, mark it down: Wherever people depart from God's wisdom for them, whether in marriage or in another area of life, they always do so to their detriment.

## Conclusion

**W**e have only just begun to see God's calling for the husband and for the wife. In the coming weeks we will look deeper at some of the specifics of these roles. ***But the main point today is for us to recognize our desperate need for the love of God and the wisdom of God to be the motivation for and foundation of our approach to marriage.*** If we do not revere Christ by imitating his love for us in the gospel as the foundation for the way that we relate to our spouse, and if we reject the wisdom of his Word by refusing to embrace the unique marriage role God has given us, then we have no reason to expect that our marriages will flourish in his name. *(That is like driving your car in the wrong direction but still expecting to arrive at your desired end.)* Instead, both our hearts and our families will more and more reflect the toaster I described earlier. ***But praise be to God that the opposite is also true. When broken sinners with broken marriages and broken families begin to walk in God's love toward one another, and begin to submit to God's wisdom for the ordering of their lives, they will likewise begin to experience God's blessing on their marriages, and God's healing for all that has been broken by sin.***