

Purposes for Marriage, Part 1—Genesis 2—7/13/25
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Today I begin a marriage refresher series, something we all need periodically as we can forget or neglect the most basic areas.

Parts of my outline are from decades-old lessons at Grace Community Church where I served before coming here.

I began using these premarital teaching outlines for counseling long ago & I have also taught from them here.

Each time I've gone over them, my wife Melanie & I have personally profited in our own marriage as well.

We are reminded & realigned to God's design & God's wisdom to rescue us in whatever ways we may have drifted.

This is valuable for you no matter your current, past, or future marital status because marriage is a microcosm of all of life.

Especially in our times of confusion, every Christian needs to be equipped to explain biblical teaching on marriage.

Since all of you have witnessed or experienced some right & wrong views of marriage, I want to frame up how to respond to these truths with thoughts from a blog from 11 years ago.

Listen to this article entitled “When I Tried That is a Problem” by Dan Phillips. [<http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2014/07/when-i-tried-that-is-a-problem.html>] ... He wrote...

Hearing a person in a troubled marriage say "I tried _____" raises a red flag of concern to me.

Why? Surely all the person is doing is sharing his frustration, his disappointment, his hurt. It isn't necessarily a claim of self-righteousness, or an attempt to build a case against his wife. He isn't necessarily trying to make me think he's the good guy,

and she's the bad evil [one]. Oh, it can be any or all of those things; but not necessarily.

So I will of course start talking about ways to implement what Scripture says to do, and he will say, "I tried that."

And that's a problem.

How? How can "I tried X" be a problem? If a doctor said "Take two ibuprofen" or "Have a hot bath," and the patient had already done so without any relief, wouldn't "I tried that" be the perfect answer? Isn't it both honest and diagnostically helpful?

In this case, no. It is helpful, but it is not a good sign. It is helpful, in that I've come to see it often as a clue to how the person approaches marriage, and his role in it.

Here's the reality: as I remarked more times than I can count when teaching on the Biblical doctrine of marriage,

"Marriage is like being a Christian— only more so."

In other words, everything I am called to be as a Christian, I am called to be in my marriage. I am called as a Christian to love, to be patient and longsuffering, to be gracious and kind, to be ready to forgive, to be devoted to serve the other for his good. I'm called to seek to embody these graces towards all.

But in just about every relationship I have, if tension arises, I can walk away. I can go home, I can go to bed, I can get distance from the locus of the tension. For that matter, I could move to the other side of the globe from it. I'm not called by God to be everyone's close friend. It isn't a moral obligation.

None of which is true with marriage. With marriage, I have all the same obligations, and more — and it's 24/7/365, it's right up there in my face, and I can't simply walk away if it gets rough.

But go back to other relationships. What is God's command to us, for those relationships? Are we called to "try" loving each other? Then, if it doesn't work, we stop, complain, do something else instead? Are we called to "try" being patient, kind, devoted to their good? How about our relationship with God? Are we to "try" holiness, see if it works for us or not? Righteousness? Faith?

You all know the answer: "Of course not." These aren't methods offered to us on a trial-basis, for us to test-drive and evaluate, then reject or embrace depending on outcome. It's not a negotiation. These attitudes and actions are our lives, as

Christians. We're called to grow this fruit, period (Gal. 5:22-23). ... This is what we are called to be, not to "try."

So: God doesn't call me to "try" loving my wife as Christ loved the church as a tactic. ... He doesn't invite me to see how that whole love-my-wife-like-Christ business works out, then to keep it up or drop it, depending on whether it "works." He doesn't call spouses to try not gossiping and complaining about each other. He doesn't call wives to try being respectful and submissive, any more than He calls children to try honoring their parents — or believing in Christ.

And so I say it is a red flag, because I've found that it often is a symptom. It may indicate that the spouse holds as the paramount value — not glorifying God and enjoying Him forever, but — being treated as he believes he deserves. That is the first and great unwritten commandment. So when his wife doesn't treat him as he deserves, that's wrong. She needs to change. But she doesn't want to. How to get her to change?

Well, he could try various things. He might yell at her. Or he might freeze her out. Or he might ignore her. Or he might talk her down to others. Or, if he's really pious, he might "try" loving her.

See what I did there? The objective is to get her to behave right. (And, for the record, she should: she should love him and honor him, and do her best to make him glad he's married to her.) In pursuit of that objective, he tries various things. This tactic, that tactic... God's commands might even be among those things he tries — in pursuit of his objective: getting her to treat him right.

So here comes the obvious rub. What if it "doesn't work"? What if she's still a merciless shrew? Well, he tried, you see? It didn't work. So he has to try something else. Like complaining about her to everyone who will listen. Like self-pity. Like growing increasingly bitter & resentful. Like wearing the martyr's robes for everyone to see. Like trying to get kids and friends to see her as he does, see how bad she is and how nobly he suffers.

Suppose, though, he realized that being a Christian who actually practices what he professes — which is, after all, what we're talking about, right? — isn't something you "try." It's something you do, come what may, and God helping you, you don't let all the powers of Hell stop you. Much less a grumpy, sharp-tongued, ungrateful spouse.

What then, when his wife responds to his love with contempt, scorn, or even abuse? What if his coming close to love & serve her just gives her a better and crueler shot at him? What then?

Let me ask you: Does the Bible say anything about how Christians should respond to verbal abuse? To ingratitude? To false accusations? ... See, marriage in that regard is not a different category of life, as if I need to treat other people by unchanging standards, but my wife is different. It isn't as if I have 66 books of direction for all my relationships, but only a few chapters that apply to relating to my wife. She's only different in that she will always be there for me to practice these graces, and I can't walk away if it gets rough.

Because being married is like being a Christian. Only more so. And in that life, what gets "tried" is us and our faith (1 Peter 1:7) — not God's commands.

I read that to rightly frame up our approach to God's Word.

I've felt the 'I've tried that' temptation & I've heard the 'I've tried that' excuse in numerous situations from parenting & marriage to work & whatever else where people blame others.

Instead of that, we ought to respond to God's truth by wanting to get our hearts right—by wanting to get our thinking right.

We should want to get our perspective looking toward God for what He says & then we can go to Him in prayer & leave results up to Him.

That is living by faith where we trust & obey God & then let God be in charge of whatever measure He chooses to bless.

We trust God's character & promises & await His good & wise results.

That can be hard at times, but it is living by faith, living for God's power, not for substitutes by our own fleshly methods.

So we do not want to listen to truth about marriage thinking of how to get your spouse to change or how your spouse or parents or others have failed & are to blame for everything.

Of course, it is sad that many of you have experienced failed or flawed marriages by your parents or in your own life.

Realizing some of the troubles of what you've witnessed & suffered can be instructional if you see a fresh opportunity to live differently.

You want to seek the power of God to live His design for His glory with no excuses or blame-shifting to others.

So listen with hope for change so that you can model a supernatural alternative to the wreckage of relationships that abounds in our culture.

We want to hold up biblical marriage as a beautiful & desirable contrast to today's non-committal, self-serving individualism.

We want to be distinct & compelling lights in these crucial areas.

And I'm thankful to look at you & be overwhelmed with the joy of how many weddings I've celebrated with you all.

I want to foster lasting love—I want to prepare some of you for that & rekindle that in others as we take time for a marriage refresher course.

We must be rooted in transcendent, timeless truths to weather the storms of unstable feelings & unsettling circumstances.

So we're going back to the beginning to outline 2 of God's purposes for marriage this morning & then we'll continue with more next week.

These are simple & straightforward, but we need to meditate on what living each purpose involves.

The 1st purpose for marriage to note is Companionship.

God designed marriage for companionship, for a whole-life comprehensive partnership, between a man and his wife.

We find that displayed in the order & explanations of the history of creation given in Genesis 1-2.

So let's turn to Genesis 2 to remember why God created & designed male & female & marriage in the first place.

Start in verse 4 to recall man's place in the garden—2:4-17. [READ]

Think of this dawn of creation—beauty & blessings galore & the man was given charge of it in fellowship with God.

But here's what I asked Melanie when I proposed to her—what was the first thing in creation that was not good, even before sin came?

It was not good for the man to be alone—despite all God's creative work daily described as good, one thing was not good.

Now read Genesis 2:18-25. [READ]

This is a narrative of literal history, not allegory or myth.

The only poetry is the man's praise of woman in verse 23.

All this was divinely inspired & purposefully ordered.

Among God's purposes here, one that stands out is companionship.

Follow that in the narrative—God formed all the animals & brought them to the man to name but none was his equal.

No animal could be the man's partner to correspond & suit him.

Animals were nice, but they were not enough.

Sorry to you animal lovers, but a dog is not really man's best friend.

Pets can be fine, but only humans are made in God's image.

So only humans can provide the fullest sense of companionship.

That's vital for a single person in godly friendships in the church where we share life & ministry together.

And it's essential for the closest sharing of life together in marriage.

So God said that it was not good that man would be alone & showed him that the animals did not fix or fill that deficit.

Then when God made woman to correspond to man, to be bone of his bones & flesh of his flesh, the man broke out in poetic praise.

Here's a point to get from that—God made marriage to be a pleasure, to be fulfilling as a blessing of sharing life together.

God made marriage as a good gift to delight man and woman in the blessings of companionship.

1st Peter 3:7 calls marriage the grace of life, a gift to enjoy.

That's why Proverbs 2:17 & Malachi 2:14 decry the folly of leaving the companion of your youth & the covenant of your God.

It's because God designed couples to enjoy long life together.

We weep when sin or suffering hinder that, but we honor that purpose.

That purpose instructs us in how to approach marriage & it also motivates us for what we can increasingly enjoy in marriage.

In a culture of lonely, depressed people with artificial, superficial, so-called friends on screens, God has made us for more.

But think of some implications of that—1st of all, it takes time.

If you are unmarried, it takes time to get to know people to be able to evaluate a person's commitment to Christ & whether more is possible.

But that time investment is worth it & being married to another Christian is a good & wise longing to pray for & pursue.

And for married couples—it takes time to grow when you are newlyweds & it takes time to keep growing throughout life.

So married couples should regularly seek to share time together & plan for that & guard that time.

Prioritizing relationships is vital in the church & in all of life & it's especially vital for cultivating God's best in marriage.

That may seem obvious, but it gets harder as life gets busier.

We as couples need to have time alone & time shared in activities & time communicating about what's not done together.

I call that getting the download—we share what happened in our day & what we want to tell & what we need to know.

It's not that every detail of every day can be recounted with perfect recollection, but all of life is shared with openness.

That requires a desire to share & a desire to listen & care.

It means pursuing & maintaining & building a deep friendship.

Marriage is far more than physical attraction or mere utilitarian function to accomplish delegated tasks.

The idea is that the other person is just that—a PERSON—and we show attention to & share life with that person.

That requires being open & vulnerable—we open every area of life to each other & never say, *That's none of your business!*

Pray for a heart to hear & share with honesty & humility & love.

So when you are asked, *What's wrong?*, if you say “*nothing*” when something IS wrong, that is neither helpful nor honest.

Married couples can even listen & be invested in caring about areas where you may not share the same interests.

It's important to know a bit of each other's work & social relationships & activities so there are no secrets.

It's vital to know & share close friends & develop interests together & partner in prayer & outreach.

Companionship should include sharing thoughts & ideas & what you are learning & how you can learn together.

It includes emotions as Romans 12:15 says for all believers to rejoice with those who rejoice & weep with those who weep.

That requires you to learn to communicate your feelings & to hear other's feelings & to enter their joys & sorrows.

That may not be easy, but we can all learn & grow.

That's how marriage is like being a Christian, only more so.

So married couples should pray together about areas of needed growth & seek the Lord with patience toward one another.

And we can read & study Scripture together & counsel one another & discuss spiritual problems & truths & convictions.

Companionship can involve serving & being hospitable together & singing & fellowship & study & enjoying all of church life together.

Expect to exhort & encourage & reprove & rebuke & build up & comfort one another as part of the Christian life together.

And be ready to share the ups & downs & praises & prayer requests.

That requires availability & building trust & that's especially required in the realm of intimacy within marriage.

Married couples must learn each other's desires & pleasures & how to serve in showing affection & when & how often.

True companionship involves watching out for one another & understanding each other's physical strengths & weaknesses.

It involves Philippians 2, being like Christ to consider others as more important than ourselves even more than in every other relationship.

There's so much to this, from financial management & plans to having children & training them & caring for physical needs.

And since we are sinners, inevitably we will sin against one another & so we should expect to repent of sins & seek & grant forgiveness.

To enjoy this purpose of God, we cannot be proud & self-sufficient & think we don't need each other.

We must be humble & serve with selflessness & grace.

And since we're all always changing with stages of life & sanctification, we always need to be working at this life together.

It is wonderful to experience, but it does require effort & investment.

It does require work—but it is divinely empowered work for the Christian that we can & should pray for & live by faith.

We trust what Proverbs 14:23 says, that *in all labor there is profit.*

We view marriage like a garden or vineyard as Psalm 128 pictures, where weeds will grow if we do nothing.

But when we work to cultivate it, we pray for God to bring blessings.

And Israel had a law to help start that properly.

Deuteronomy 24:5 prescribed a year OFF from foreign deployment for military service for a newlywed.

Deuteronomy 24:5 says, *“When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”*

Such a law in Israel again reminds us of the importance of marriage.

That priority emphasis is also seen in the qualifications for leadership in the church in 1st Timothy 3 & Titus 1.

God knows spiritual leadership is tested & proven in the closet crucible of a man’s love & trustworthiness in relationship.

So we must prioritize marriage through seasons of life where every other relationship—even good ones—can pull us away.

That doesn’t mean we idolize marriage & neglect kids or avoid serving others, but companionship must be cultivated.

As we’ve reviewed these familiar truths, what do you need to freshly apply or what you may have neglected?

Is there an area of God’s purpose of companionship that you have not approached rightly or valued appropriately?

One area where this companionship can be undermined or attacked comes when we minimize a 2nd purpose for marriage.

That 2nd purpose is that God designed marriage for COMPLETION—a 1st broad purpose of marriage is companionship & a 2nd is completion.

God brought the woman to the man to be his equal companion, but the way God did that also taught more.

Genesis 2:18-25 also taught about the different roles of the man & the woman in general & especially within marriage.

God created the man first & spoke to the man first to charge him with rule over the earth before God ever created the woman.

1st Corinthians 11 & 1st Timothy 2 are NT passages that highlight the greater significance of the order that man was created first.

Man was representative head of the race & God gave him his role before God created the woman & stated her role.

God planned each step with wise purposes—first to establish man’s leading role & second to establish his need for a companion & helper.

Genesis 2:18 says God said it was not good for man to be alone.

Of course, that doesn’t mean singleness is a lesser category of human existence or that being single is being helpless.

But it does mean that God created all of us to need others, to need relationships, & those begin in the family & the church.

Then He designed the closest relationship to be enjoyed in marriage.

God created woman to be the helper corresponding to the man, the one suitable to come alongside him & fit to round him out.

That’s what I mean by completion—I mean complementary in relationship with each other, in roles & in strengths & weaknesses.

Read Genesis 2:18-25 again as we consider this. [READ]

Since the term helper is used of God Himself in Scripture, it is not demeaning to be designed as a helper.

But it is defining—it is clarifying that God created woman with this special purpose to be the man's helper, to be suitable to him, corresponding to him as his equal & his support.

The distinction of roles of husband & wife—most basically as leader & helper—defines some of the function of marital companionship.

The distinctiveness of male & female did not rank their significance as one over another, but it did order their function.

God gave direction for the relational responsibilities historically first in marriage & then later in the church & other realms.

So marriage is the primary training & proving ground.

It's amazing to watch how leading a wife is so formative for young men & how helping a husband beautifully blossoms a young lady.

God designed us for that purpose of serving one another in complementary ways & we need to embrace that selfless approach to life & relationships.

And if you are single—listen kids & young people especially—you can practice your role by the way you respond to family & others.

Boys & young men—treat your mom with honor & your sisters with gentleness & other girls & ladies with kindness.

And young ladies—treat your dad with respect & submission & treat your brothers & other guys with appreciation & gracious help.

You can practice God's purposes in preparation for marriage.

And that's not only meaningful & useful—it's transformational.

That's also why God often gives us spouses who are opposite in many ways—because we need what the other brings.

We need their way of seeing things & their way of relating to people.

We need the role distinctions that guide us into God's design.

God puts us together to complement one another—not compliment with an 'I' like saying something nice, but with an 'E' like completing.

It's like two parts make the whole, two gears make the motor function, two partners make the team complete.

But get something here—since it's completion, it's not competition—let me say that again—it's NOT competition.

Married couples are not to compete with one another over whose role is the most significant or who is doing the most work or contributing the most or who knows more or is better.

Listen—that is the curse of sin, not the designed blessing of God.

We don't have time to turn to Genesis 3 to see the curse of God saying that man would be tempted to oppress his wife like Cain needed to crush sin when it tried to control him in Genesis 4.

Guys—that's the opposite of sacrificially leading with love.

Then also God's curse on the woman in Genesis 3 would tempt her to desire her husband in the same way sin desired Cain in Genesis 4—& that was to rule him, to take over.

So be warned against that, ladies—do not compete to rule or control your husband or usurp his role or put him down & put yourself up.

Please know that is living the curse, **not** living the dream.

So men & ladies—kill those desires when they arise.

Reverse the curse instead & resist every such destructive drive.

As Jose taught the youth from 1st Peter 3 at our retreat—a lady should not try to get her way by words or appearances, but instead trust God.

Let God work in His way by His design & 1st Peter 3 explains those distinctive, complementary roles for men & women.

1st Peter 3 tells men to live with understanding & honor their wives.

Ephesians 5:22-33 also describes these biblical roles of husbands & wives like Christ's relationship with the church.

Husbands are called to loving, sacrificial leadership & wives are called to submissive helping & following.

And realize how that completion also extends to the formation of a new household with each new marriage.

When Genesis 2:24-25 says to leave & cleave, that is to start a whole new home & family, to transition to a new phase of life.

It is to move into a new sharing of all things with the one you are united in a one-flesh partnership.

That is a new fundamental unity of society & new priority relationship.

That involves serious changes—the word means loose, cut loose so it's a free letting go in order to cling to a new spouse.

That doesn't mean abandon to the extreme of breaking all connections.

And it certainly does not mean bearing no responsibility in loving & caring for parents, especially as they age.

The Christian couple's role of caring for widows or elderly in need in their family is important & Scripture values the role of grandparents.

But a new home must be formed with a shift in roles.

Cleaving in marriage means taking full ownership of decisions in a way that values parental counsel but takes initiative & responsibility.

And this kind of cleaving is like glue—it's an intense word-picture—and it's not used of child-parent relations nor is it shared with anyone else, just husband & wife.

And similarly, no other relationship is described as being one flesh.

Being one flesh honors the physical, sexual intimacy that is protected for enjoyment only in marriage.

But that one-flesh description is not only about the physical aspects.

It is broader in the sense that all of life is viewed through the lens of "we" & no longer just "me".

Marriage is a huge transition from 'me' to 'we' & that can be harder the longer you have been entrenched in 'me' habits.

Yet in the union of marriage, unity is not uniformity.

This is not a uniform loss of personal identity or individuality where we can't have different preferences or opinions.

God did not intend us to be exactly alike or to think the same about everything & never have to listen & learn.

Like the church can be one & yet Christians be different in many ways as Romans 12-14 & 1st Corinthians 12-14 teach, so can a married couple have far more unity in their diversity.

You might think of illustrations of many people working together from the sports world as a team or from music.

A sports team or an orchestra have many different players with different talents & they work together for a common goal.

Similarly, husband & wife can have different interests, gifts, personalities, likes & dislikes—and yet share oneness.

Again, marriage is like being a Christian, only more so.

Truths that apply in all of life apply even more so in marriage.

That's why preparing for marriage starts with growing in the basics of Christian life & ministry & relationships.

And that's why growing in marriage continues with growing in the basics of Christian life & ministry & relationships.

We need the gifts & failings of each other as part of God shaping us.

So we trust in God's good providence that gave us the spouses we have for both their strengths and their weaknesses.

Remember this completing design of God & approach marriage & all of life with gratitude for one another, even for our differences.

Then as you hear all this, ask yourself—how are you doing in embracing & pursuing God's complementary purpose?

Are you undermining or attacking or neglecting God's design in any way in your marriage or in other relationships?

God's design for marriage was for husband & wife to complete each other & minister to one another in mutually helpful ways.

Focus on what you can give for your spouse to flourish in God's ways.

Be thankful for God's design & His wisdom & work for you.

Remember that men & women are equal in personhood, but different in roles—and that is part of God's pre-fall, wise, loving goodness.

So embrace & appreciate that good purpose of completion.

I've covered a lot today & I pray God helps us all to apply it.

But 1st I pray you have a heart for all this & power to live it.

If you are just trying God's truth to get something else you want, then you are not living by faith in God's purposes & you will be frustrated.

And if you are trying to obey God's ways in your own strength, you will still be missing His design & likely be discouraged.

So remember that God's purposes are put before us to show us His wisdom & goodness & also to show us our need for His grace & help.

We need Him, first to forgive all the ways we don't follow His design or even want His design.

Then we need Him to change our hearts & fill us with His Spirit to walk in His ways.

The Good News is that God provides all that in Jesus Christ.

So let me point you to Jesus Christ the God who became Man to live sinlessly & die sacrificially for the sins of all who trust Him & then rose again to prove His victory.

If you don't know Him, start there & we'd love to help you.

If you do know Him, return to Him in response to truth of His design.

Pray with me as we close.