

**06/06/21 “Whom shall I marry?”
Various Scriptures**

Welcome...

Every month, millions of older people who own cell phones still pay thirty to forty dollars to maintain a home phone line, just because they always have. Even though cell phones have rendered landlines all but antiquated, many older people have yet to update their thinking. It is a natural assumption and reflex that you need a land line for your phone and you just keep paying that bill. Yes, I still have a phone line- I guess that makes me older!

You may laugh at your parents for not getting how the world has moved on, but there are a few unchallenged assumptions that singles in our culture are susceptible to as well. Many blindly accept that they will know the right person to marry based on two things that will guarantee happiness: romantic attraction and relational compatibility. But is romantic attraction and relational compatibility all that there is to a successful marriage. What does the Bible say about marriage and how one is to know whether to get married?

This morning as we continue our series on biblical manhood and womanhood we want to know what God says are the key ingredients for a successful marriage. Last week we looked at singleness and understood that singleness, whether for a season or for a lifetime, provides the opportunity and freedom to use your gifts in undivided devotion to the Lord.

But if you desire to be married, then we want to look at the Bible and answer the question, “Whom shall I marry?”

And what we will find is that the Bible has a different goal, it offers biblical truth and wisdom as opposed to myths, traditions and feelings, and it describes marriage as a very unique display of God’s grace. That is actually our outline this morning.

My prayer is that you will if you look at the question of why you want to marry before you choose whom to marry and that you gain a vision for how two well-matched believers can work in harmony to seek the kingdom of God, grow in righteousness, and fulfill their unique calling in Christ.

I. What is the goal?

Knowing why we are married and should stay married is crucial. The key question is this: Will you approach marriage from a God-centered view or a man-centered view?

2 Corinthians 5:6-9...

Heaven was not simply a destination for Paul: it was a motivation. Like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, he looked for the heavenly city and governed his life by eternal values. He had a confident faith that conquered fear, and he had a future hope that was both a destination and a motivation.

If you approach marriage in a man centered way you will enter marriage and be satisfied as long as your desires and expectations are met.

In a God-centered view, we delight in our marriage and persevere in our marriage because it brings glory to God and points a sinful world to a reconciling Creator. I will enter this relationship and maintain it with an entirely new motivation, one stated by Paul 2 Corinthians 5:9, “So we make it our goal to please God.”

Ask ten people on the street what their goal in life is, and you'll get an amazing variety of answers. But Paul tells us our one clear answer should be, "We make it our goal to please God."

The first purpose in marriage — beyond happiness, sexual intimacy, the bearing of children, companionship, mutual care and provision, or anything else — is to please God. The challenge, of course, is that it is utterly selfless living. So, rather than asking, "What will make me happy?" we are told that we must ask, "What will make God happy?"

And just in case we don't grasp it immediately, Paul underscores it a few verses later. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:14-15...

Notice first what sin does. Sin turns us in on ourselves so that we simply "live for ourselves." Sin causes us shrink our focus, motivation and concern to the size of our own wants, needs and feelings. Because of sin, we really do love us, and we have a wonderful plan for our own lives!

But God wants something better. He sent His Son to live, die, and rise again to set you free from your bondage to sin. His grace is meant to bring you to the end of yourself so that you will finally begin to place your identity, your meaning and purpose, and your inner sense of well-being in Him.

Then instead of approaching marriage asking, "What will make me happy?" or "What will make my spouse happy?" we are told that we must ask "What will make God happy?"

Paul says, "Those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again." You see in our marriages, we have an entirely new motivation. I live and love for Jesus Christ.

Yes, there will be disappointments and difficulties, but God designed marriage to teach us how to love like He loves us. In His love, He knows that you are not all that you were created to be. Even though it may be hard to admit, there is still sin inside you, and that sin gets in the way of what you are meant to be and designed to do. And when you have two sinners living in marriage, sparks will fly and lightning will strike.

On August 15, 2020 Paula and I were driving to Davis, CA to visit our daughter. To our surprise we found ourselves in a middle of lightning show. Over 100 lightning strikes occurred on that one day.

Now I had witnessed powerful lightning strikes where I grew up in Maryland, but the most powerful ones were in Florida during Navy flight training. But the difference between a lightning strike in California vs Florida is rain and thus the amount of danger of starting a fire. The explosion of lightning-sparked fires in the Bay Area went down in the record books as the Siege of 2020.

Florida has a lot of trees, but forests in Florida are so wet that lightning strikes cause relatively few fires. The fact is strong Christian marriages will still be struck by lightning — sexual temptation, communication problems, frustrations, unrealized expectations — but if the marriages are heavily watered with an unwavering commitment to please God above everything else, the conditions won't be ripe for a devastating fire to follow the lightning strike.

But if I'm married only for happiness, and my happiness wanes for whatever reason, one little spark will burn the entire forest of my relationship. But if my aim is to proclaim and model God's ministry of love, hope, forgiveness and reconciliation, then by God's grace my marriage will be fireproof.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21...

So, in a society where relationships are discarded with a frightening regularity, married Christians take a covenant before God and are commissioned by God to be an effective witness for Christ – learning to confess and forgive their spouse, learning how to please God. And when people look at your marriage ask why you have joy and hope, you can tell them about our great Savior and ask, “Would you like to hear more about that good news of reconciliation?”

In this sense, our marriages can be platforms for evangelism. They can draw people into a truth that points beyond this world into the next.

What is the goal? To please God and to know Christ and make Him known.

II. Popular Myths vs Biblical Truth

You may be asking, Pastor John Marc, you still haven’t answered the question, Whom shall I marry? How will I know whom to marry?” And you may get the answer, “Oh, you’ll just know.” And I will tell you that is a myth not a biblical truth.

We’ve all heard those stories: the man and woman meet, and from the first moment they just “know.” But you’ve been dating for almost a year, and you don’t have that same sense. If this is God’s spouse for you, shouldn’t you just know?

The problem here is that nowhere in Scripture does God ever say that based a feeling in your heart we’ll just know what to do - about anything. At least, not normally. Kevin DeYoung’s has book about biblical decision making entitled Just Do Something. Here is the subtitle: “How to make a decision without dreams, visions, fleeces, impressions, open doors, random Bible verses, casting lots, liver shivers, writing in the sky, etc.”

God certainly can do all of those things. But normally He doesn’t. Normally the way God guides us is through what the Bible calls wisdom. We use our sanctified judgment, shaped by the truth of His word and the counsel of others, to make the decision that seems best.

Sometimes you’ll know that you love this person who might become your spouse. But even then you should be suspicious. Has God really decided - quite unusually - to lead through your feelings alone? Or are those just your hormones talking?

Another myth is, he or she will change for the better after we are married.

We should expect that marriage will change us. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says it’s God’s will that we be sanctified - and one of his main tools for doing that is marriage. So if you’re looking for someone who loves you just the way you are and never wants you to change, you’re in for a big surprise. And yet you should never marry someone assuming how God will change them.

God nowhere promises that he will change that annoying laugh or that pornography problem or that struggle with honesty or that history of laziness. You should never get married to someone under the assumption that something about them will change. The sanctification agenda is in God’s hands, not yours.

That’s a good summary of what not to believe when you’re trying to figure out who to marry. How do you decide whom to marry? Wisdom is the biblical truth you need. That’s the Bible’s approach to decision-making. Not some kind of mystical, “wait until God speaks to you.” But wisdom.

Proverbs 23:23 says, “Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding”. That’s our approach. Bathe your mind in Scripture. Follow Christ with all your heart. Seek the counsel of others. And marry a person where together you can serve God better than apart.

But what does that person look like? Here are five questions to ask yourself:

1. Is he/she clearly a believer? As Proverbs 31:30 says, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” I know you know that. And yet so often we don’t really believe it. But really: you want to marry a man or a woman who fears the Lord. You want to marry someone who is a healthy, growing Christian. If you have any uncertainty in answering this question, get counsel from a wise Christian friend ASAP.

Your goal isn’t simply to check the box on the person being a Christian. As in, “he says he prayed a prayer when he was six years old. Check.” Does he or she show an evident love for Christ in their values and priorities? Can you tell that they’re a Christian from their schedule and their bank statement? From their passions and their dreams? Are they ashamed of the gospel or do they share it with unbelievers?

2. Does he or she faithfully make use of the means of grace? Scripture reading, prayer, church, and so forth. Does he or she show an evident trust in God’s word? How does that show up in their decision-making?
3. Does his or her life show clear fruit of God’s Spirit? Walk through the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. These fruits of the Spirit aren’t there to show who the “super Christians” are (as if the Bible even has a category for that)—but to show who the Christians are. Our lives should all exhibit these things—and in increasing measure as we mature.
4. Is he or she fruitful in ministry? This means they don’t just say they want to spend their life for Jesus; you can see it in action. Evangelism, discipling, and hospitality are going to be the main fruit you’ll look for in anyone’s life. Does he or she have evident love and care for others? Jesus was clear that his followers will be marked by love—and particularly, by love for others in the church (John 13:35).
5. Do others that you trust hold them in high regard? To know someone well you need to know what others think of them. If your parents, most trusted friends, and pastors and shepherds don’t think highly of him or her, then you need break up. Remember, this is someone you will entrust with your money, your children, your friendships, and in many ways, your soul. Listen to those who love God and love you enough to speak the truth to you.

Of course, part of finding the right person to marry is becoming the right person, so you can ask the same questions for yourself.

III. Marriage is a Unique Display of God’s Grace

God’s design for marriage in the Bible pictures the husband loving his wife the way Christ loves his people, and the wife responding to her husband the way Christ’s people should respond to him. This picture was in God’s mind when he sent Christ into the world. Christ came for his bride and died for her to display the way marriage was meant to be.

God’s idea for marriage preceded the union of Adam and Eve and the coming of Christ. We know this because when the apostle Paul explained the mystery of marriage in Ephesians 5:31-32, he reached back to the beginning of the Bible and quoted Genesis 2:24, “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the

two shall become one flesh.” Then in the next sentence he interpreted what he had just quoted: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

That means that in God’s mind marriage was designed in the beginning to display Christ’s relationship to His people. The reason marriage is called a “mystery” is that this aim for marriage was not clearly revealed until the coming of Christ. Now we see that marriage is meant to make Christ’s love for His people more visible in the world.

That’s why Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” And to wives it says, “Be subject to your husband as to the Lord” Ephesians 5:22.

This kind of love is possible because Christ died for both husband and wife. For a Christian husband and wife neither needs to make the other suffer for sins. Christ has borne that suffering. Now as two sinful and forgiven people we can return good for evil and display the covenant-keeping love and grace between Christ and His church.

It is only when we really do believe that life is bigger than us, that there is a grand design and purpose for marriage, that there is something more important than our wants, needs, and feelings, and that we have been given life and breath for the purposes, plans, and praise of God, that we will be willing to love unconditionally, be humble and honest with God and each other, to confess our sin and to forgive each other just as Christ has forgiven us.

Let’s pray...