



# God's Design *for Marriage*



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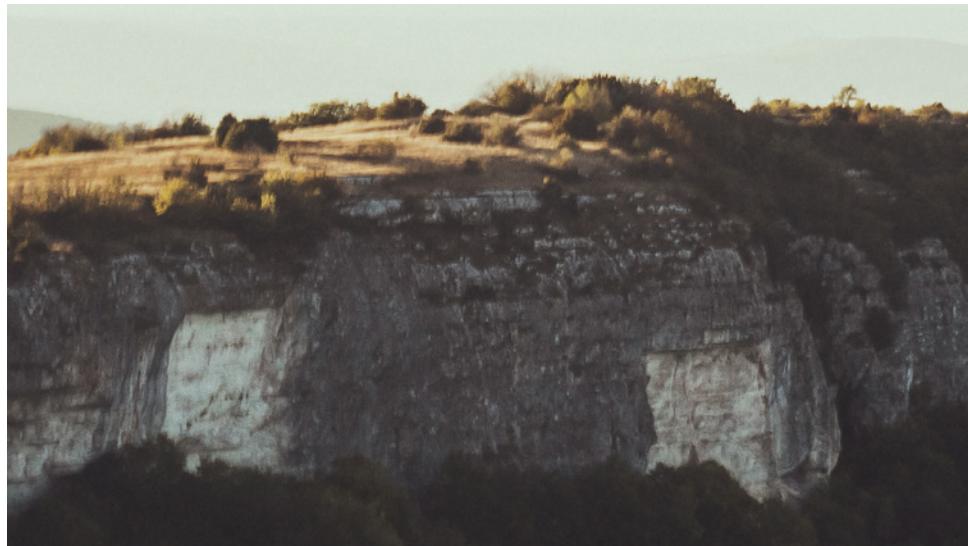
# Introduction

In recent decades views on marriage have undergone startling revisions. Though marriage has been long cherished as the building block of societies and nations, today many have become skeptical of this union, and the percentage of people getting married is in serious decline.

According to data collected by the United Nations, people are now marrying at later ages, and in some nations an increasing percentage of adults do not marry at all. There are multiple reasons for these global trends.

In many Western nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and much of Europe, it has become increasingly common for people to live together prior to marriage or to simply live together without marrying. And a growing percentage choose to remain single.

The traditional understanding that marriage is a union between a man and a woman is also being swept aside. The Council on Foreign Relations reports that many Western democracies have legalized same-sex marriage. Supporters of same-sex marriage have successfully lobbied for people to have the right to marry whomever they choose, regardless of gender.



Concurrent with these legal changes is a psychological change—a growing sense of loneliness. This profound sense of being alone is considered pandemic—stretching across multiple nations and continents. *Health Progress* reports that in the U.S. “it is estimated that 27-28 percent of the population feels lonely, an increase on the order of 3 to 7 percent over the last 20 years. … In England loneliness is considered so serious that people have created an entire national ‘Campaign to End Loneliness’” (“[Loneliness: A Global Pandemic](#),” July-August 2018).

Where are these changes to traditional marriage taking us? Have we lost sight of biblical wisdom that should lead to happiness and healthy societies?

In this booklet we are going to consider marriage as God intended. As you’ll see, the institution of marriage was created by God as a profound gift to mankind. It was designed by our Creator to be an oasis of intimacy, stability and love for adults and for the children engendered through this special relationship. Turn the page to learn more about this blessing from God.



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Chapter 1

*What Is Marriage?*



here can we find out the real story of how, when, where and why marriage began? In the Holy Bible. More copies of this book have been published than any other written work, yet it is little understood. But by going into it, we can find a deep understanding of the meaning of marriage and how God designed it to work.

The Bible explains how it all began.

## First, He made a man

To discover the beginning of marriage, we start in Genesis, the book of beginnings. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

The man God created, Adam, was at first the only human being. God immediately gave him responsibilities, instructing him in how to care for his environment, tending and keeping it (verse 15).

## But the man was alone ...

The world in which Adam lived was beautiful and perfect, with one notable exception—Adam was alone.

He was surrounded by animals of every kind, but he was by himself. God gave Adam the task of naming all the animals (verse 19), an exercise that seems intended by God to emphasize to Adam just how different he was from the animal kingdom. He alone was made in God’s “image,” with intellect and the capacity to reason and create.

By the time he finished naming the animals, Adam was also likely very aware that something was missing, which God confirmed.

“And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (verse 18). So God took one of Adam’s ribs and fashioned someone who would be the perfect complement to Adam—a woman.

She was the ideal companion—someone with whom he could share his life. Someone he could relate to on an intimate level, sharing his deepest thoughts and desires. And, just as important, she was someone with whom he could build and raise a family.

## The first marriage

After God presented her to Adam, He said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (verse 24). The institution of marriage, which still exists today, began with these words. Adam and Eve became man and wife.

Marriage was to be an inseparable union. That God fashioned Eve from one of Adam’s ribs reflects the permanent and intimate connection that was always to be between them. They shared some of the same substance, and they were to share their lives together from that point on.

It is interesting that God didn’t choose Adam’s skull or his foot to fashion Eve from, which would have represented the woman being either above or below him. He chose a rib, which seems to symbolize Eve’s place at his side. As we will see later in this booklet, a godly marriage includes a husband and wife working together, side by side.



## Is Polygamy Acceptable to God?

An unfortunate practice that arose after God established the institution of marriage is polygamy. Polygamy is the practice of having more than one spouse at the same time, and it has been primarily practiced by men having multiple wives.

Though people in the Western world may think of polygamy as an archaic practice, the fact is that it is legal in 58 countries and is widely practiced throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Some point to the examples of polygamy in the Bible and think that God sanctioned the practice of men having multiple wives. But the truth is that God never ordained polygamy and does not approve of it.

God's intent was made clear when He created marriage. He took one rib from Adam and created one woman. He then ordained that man would leave his parents "and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

When God's law was codified and given to Moses at Mount Sinai, God considered the sanctity of marriage so important that He dedicated one of the 10 Commandments to guarding it. The **Seventh Commandment** clearly states, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). This means that a married person is not to have sexual relations with anyone other than his or her spouse. God does not want anything or anyone to interfere with the special relationship between a husband and wife.

Later, when Jesus Christ was addressing the subject of marriage and divorce, He quoted Genesis as God's original intent for marriage: one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6). When the

They formed a family unit in which they were to enjoy deep conversations, quiet moments, difficulties and stress, and the kind of intimate, physical relationship that God intended be experienced only by husband and wife.

## God intended children

After He created Adam and Eve, we read, "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be *fruitful and multiply*; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:28, emphasis added throughout).

God did not design most of the animal world to procreate in monogamous family units. This is an important distinction between humanity and the animals. From the beginning, marriage was designed to be the perfect environment for children to be born into and cared for. Before the Bible says anything about other elements of human society, God established marriage and family, which shows He intended the family to be the basic building block of society.

Simply put, God intended for children to be born and raised within a family composed of a husband and a wife.

Centuries later the psalmist wrote, “Behold, children are a heritage [inheritance] from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3).

## God reaffirms His plan for marriage in the New Testament

Through the words of Jesus Christ and the apostles, we can see that God’s perspective of marriage as a loving, monogamous relationship between one man and one woman has not changed.

Responding to the Pharisees regarding a question they had asked about the lawfulness of divorce, Jesus said, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

In describing the qualifications of a leader in the Church, Paul wrote that he must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2), reaffirming the way God designed marriage to be from the creation of Adam and Eve.

apostle Paul addressed marriage, he also recognized only monogamous marriages between one man and one woman (Ephesians 5:31-33; 1 Timothy 3:2).

Even though Adam and Eve rebelled against God and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, the biblical narrative shows them living out their lives with each other and having children. For about five generations, it appears their children followed that example (Genesis 4:17-18).

But in time we find people departing from this pattern established by the Creator. Lamech is the first man the Bible records as having two wives (Genesis 4:19). And as the biblical record continues, we read a sad history of men taking multiple wives and concubines (women who didn’t have the same status or privileges as wives). These relationships were outside the pattern God had established.

When we read the Bible’s stories of individuals who practiced polygamy, we don’t read about men living in happiness and marital bliss with their multiple wives. When we are given details of these marriages, we mostly read about drama, strife and jealousy (Genesis 16; 29-30; 1 Kings 11:1-4).

Polygamy was never God’s intent or something that pleased Him. Like divorce, it was allowed because of the “hardness” of the people’s hearts in Old Covenant times (Matthew 19:8). In New Testament times, God expects His people to practice marriage only as He originally designed and intended it: between one man and one woman.

It is only through lifelong monogamy that we can truly understand the spiritual symbolism of marriage as a picture of the deep relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Then in Galatians 5:19 Paul reminded Christians that they are commanded by God to avoid both adultery and fornication—instruction that the sexual union is to be exclusive to the marriage relationship.

The marriage of Adam and Eve began with God's personal blessing (Genesis 1:28). And God—because of His enduring character—does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). He still desires today that people marry and build families according to His instructions—so that they can experience its blessings.



## Same-Sex Marriage

The widespread acceptance of same-sex marriage in the Western world has been one of the most stunning social developments of modern society. The [Pew Research Center](#) reports that "in 2001, Americans opposed same-sex marriage by a margin of 57% to 35%. ... Based on polling in 2017, a majority of Americans (62%) support same-sex marriage, while 32% oppose it." Other Western countries have seen similarly fast acceptance.

While approval of same-sex marriage by the majority of the public has come with startling speed, these relationships have actually been around for a long time. The *Ancient History Encyclopedia* states, "Sexuality in ancient Egypt was considered just another aspect of life on earth. There were no taboos concerning sex and no stigma attached to any aspect of it except for infidelity, and, among the lower classes, incest. ... There are no proscriptions against homosexuality at all and it is thought that the long-lived Pepi II (c. 2278–2184 BCE) was homosexual" (Joshua J. Mark, "[Love, Sex, and Marriage in Ancient Egypt](#)").

When the children of Israel fled Egypt, they were instructed by God: "According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. ... *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman*. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:3, 22).

Although some historians dispute the claim of homosexuality in ancient Egypt, this passage indicates that this practice most likely existed there. The Bible clearly shows it existed in Canaan, the land the Israelites entered. For example, during the time of Abraham and Lot, homosexuality was one of the sins of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-7).

Homosexuality is thus tied to the practices of nations the Israelites were familiar with. It was described as an abomination to God, so much so that those in ancient Israel who practiced it were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:13).

The point is this: Biblical marriage—that is, marriage designed and approved by God—is between a male and a female. It is this type of union that is able to produce the blessing of children and raise them with the nurture of a loving father and mother.





# Chapter 2

# *Biblical Sexuality vs. Secular Standards*

# B

efore we continue our exploration of marriage as God intends, we need to understand how different God's standards for marriage are from those that originated in the ancient world. This information is not just history but explains how and why society today largely rejects what the Bible teaches on sex in favor of alternative values.

It is widely recognized that sexuality is one of the most powerful drives within the human body. Unfortunately, this natural desire placed within us by our Creator has been severely exploited, manipulated and degraded by an evil spirit being called “the Devil and Satan” (Revelation 20:2).

The devil is a malevolent, spiteful being who has from the beginning of mankind’s history sought to deceive us into thinking that God’s instructions on almost all matters—including sexuality—are overly restrictive, repressive and unnecessary. Satan has been remarkably successful in his campaign—he has deceived “the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

Capitalizing on the pleasures of sex and the amazing power of reproduction, religions that arose in competition with God were designed around sexuality. Pagans commonly worshipped fertility gods and goddesses with rites that included having sexual relations with temple prostitutes. Some were so abominable as to include child sacrifice in these immoral, ungodly forms of worship (Ezekiel 16:20).

## Worship of Baal

While people today may be aware of the many Greek and Roman gods and goddesses of fertility, worship systems involving sex actually originated much earlier. The Canaanites of the second millennium B.C. worshipped Baal (a Semitic noun meaning “owner” or “lord,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “[Baal](#)”). Baal, they believed, controlled life and fertility for everything from crops to animals to humans.

At its heart, Baal worship included perversion of God’s instructions on sex and an alternative explanation for how people could be blessed with abundant crops.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains that the Baals were “the symbols of the reproductive powers of nature, and thus their worship ministered to sexual indulgences, which it at the same time legalized and encouraged. Further, there was placed side by side with the Ba’al a corresponding female symbol, the

Ashtoreth and the relation between the two deities was set forth as the example and the motive of unbridled sensuality” (“[Ba’al and Ba’al-Worship](#)”). Temple prostitution was a common part of their debased religious rituals.

## Sexual standards in Egypt and Canaan

The effects of the unrestrained sexual activity encouraged by pagan worship were evident in both Egypt and Canaan—the areas in which the ancient Israelites resided. In Egypt sex had almost no regulations.

The *Ancient History Encyclopedia* states: “Unmarried women were free to have sex with whomever they chose and the Ebers Medical Papyrus, written c. 1542 BCE, provides recipes for contraceptives. … Abortions were also available and there was no more stigma attached to them than to pre-marital sex. In fact, there is no word for ‘virgin’ in ancient Egyptian; suggesting that one’s degree of sexual experience—or lack of any—was not thought a matter of consequence” (“[Love, Sex, and Marriage in Ancient Egypt](#)”).

This is the environment from which God delivered the ancient Israelites when He led them out of their slavery in Egypt. He reeducated them about the pure and wholesome intent of sex from the creation, but Baal worship, with its promiscuity and lack of boundaries, continually lured the Israelites. Whether 3,000 years ago or today, the idea of no sexual rules or restrictions has always had a strong appeal to humans, much to our hurt.

But God calls His people to a different way of life.

## Called to different values

When God began working with the ancient Israelites, He did so to fulfill a promise He had made to Abraham that He would bless this patriarch’s descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). God gave His laws for human conduct to the Israelites with the desire that they would be an example to other nations of how to live prosperous, joyous and successful lives (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

God’s law included instructions on how He was to be worshipped. Unfortunately, the Israelites as a whole didn’t obey the instructions they were given.

When Moses was away from the camp receiving instructions from God, Aaron and the people made a golden calf. This reflected the worship practices of Egypt. In their celebration, the people “offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and *rose up to play*” (Exodus 32:6).

**"Do not be deceived.  
Neither fornicators,  
nor idolaters, nor  
adulterers, nor  
homosexuals, nor  
sodomites, nor  
thieves, nor covetous,  
nor drunkards,  
nor revilers, nor  
extortioners  
will inherit the  
kingdom of God."**

The apostle Paul quotes this verse (and also Numbers 25:1-9) in his letter to the Corinthians, who came out of a society steeped in idolatry and sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 10:7-8). Sexually immoral practices, intertwined with idolatry and pagan worship, were a common temptation to Israel and, later, even to some in the Church.

After being punished by God for their ungodly actions, the ancient Israelites renewed their covenant with God. Through Moses, God again instructed the people that they were to destroy the pagan objects of worship and not worship any other god.

God explained, “Otherwise, you may make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they *prostitute* themselves with their gods and offer sacrifices to their gods, someone may invite you and then you may eat some of their sacrifices. You are not to take any of their daughters for your sons. Otherwise, when their daughters *prostitute* themselves with their gods, they may cause your sons to *prostitute* themselves with their gods” (Exodus 34:15-16, International Standard Version).

To “prostitute” oneself or “play the harlot” (New King James Version) meant to worship the idol instead of God and included the sexual activity that accompanied that worship. In giving His laws for sexual conduct, God was calling the ancient Israelites to a higher standard of conduct, one that would lead to a healthy relationship between Him and the people and to better relationships between husbands and wives.

Under God’s sexual standards, women were to be respected. He established the ideal that the intimacy between a husband and wife was to be a special bond that would yield joy and happiness and provide a healthy environment for spouses and their children. This stood in great contrast to the sexual values of pagan nations, where women, children and animals were often simply objects used by males for sexual gratification.

## Sexual standards of the New Testament

Today some people believe that the higher standards of love that God gave for spouses in the Old Testament can be practiced outside of the traditional male-female marital union. Some believe that the New Testament permits same-sex and premarital sexual relationships if they are based on love and are not connected with the worship of an idol.

In short, a common but mistaken belief is that the laws regarding sexual conduct are not really part of the gospel. Cohabitation prior to marriage and same-sex relationships have thus become commonly accepted practices in our world today, even by people claiming to be Christians.

Such reasoning, however, is not supported by Scripture.

Although first-century sexual standards among gentiles (non-Israelites) were largely the same as they had been in more ancient times, Jesus Christ and the apostles taught that God's instructions on this area of life had not changed. Jesus upheld the concept that marriage was between a man and a woman (Matthew 19:4-6), and Paul often reminded Church members to avoid sexual sins.

Writing to the Corinthians, whose city was renowned for its temple prostitutes and liberal sexual values, Paul warned the brethren to reject the secular values around them. Specifically, he wrote: "Do not be deceived. Neither *fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites*, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Some failed to take his admonition to heart. In a subsequent letter to these people Paul said that he mourned for those who had "not repented of the *uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness*" which they had committed (2 Corinthians 12:21).

To the people of Galatia, Paul wrote that "*adultery, fornication, uncleanness, [and] lewdness*" were "works of the flesh" to be avoided (Galatians 5:19). He admonished the Ephesians, "But *fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints*" (Ephesians 5:3). And to the members at Colossae he said, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: *fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5).

Some liberal-minded thinkers today suggest that Paul later changed his mind regarding God's sexual standards. But such thinking is clearly misguided.



Among the last writings incorporated for us in the Bible are warnings against fornication, adultery and sodomy (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Timothy 1:10). In one of his later writings Paul pointedly told Timothy that such conduct was “contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10).

### The basis of sexual deception

Paul reminded Church members in Rome that God will judge “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). He then explained how people lost their ability to discern what was wholesome and good from what was evil. The apostle wrote that it was actually a series of steps that led to unsound reasoning regarding sexual conduct.

From the beginning, Paul wrote, people had no excuse for not recognizing the power of the Creator through what He had made. And, “although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (verse 21). When their hearts were darkened, they lost the ability to think and reason soundly—“professing to be wise, they became fools” (verse 22).

With their darkened hearts, Satan easily led them into idolatry—the foolish idea that worship of an idol could provide blessings to the worshipper. Paul wrote, “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves” (verse 24). In other words, since they were determined to snub Him and pursue their own desires, He did not stop them.

When people reject God, they feel liberated and free to fulfill their sexual desires as they deem appropriate (verses 26-31). They don’t want God telling them how to live. And they certainly don’t want another human judging them for their conduct. When God’s standards for sexual conduct are rejected, morality is reduced to vague, subjective perspectives.

## The Truth About Abortion

The current language and discourse about abortion and when life begins shows how confused the Western world has become. Is it a baby or a fetus? Is it ending a life or ending a pregnancy? Is abortion a health procedure or murder? Is it “my body” or an unborn human? Is it a clump of tissue or a human being?

The Bible teaches that life is indicated by “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7) and “blood” (Leviticus 17:11). Both oxygen (the “breath of life”) and blood are required for life. And soon after conception, both are clearly present.

Within just a few days after conception, the fertilized egg attaches itself to the mother’s uterine wall and begins receiving oxygen through the mother’s blood. Within a month, there is a circulatory system (containing oxygenated blood), and within six weeks, a distinct heartbeat can be heard.

By the time a woman realizes she is pregnant, the circulatory system has already developed, and a separate life has begun. For deeper insight on when human life begins, read our article [“Is Abortion Wrong?”](#)

### So why do people get abortions?

Abortion is often framed by pro-choice proponents as a health need. But the reality is that the vast majority of abortions are not carried out to save a mother’s life. In 2010 a study in the U.S. exploring the reasons [women seek abortions](#) was very revealing:

- 40 percent of women stated that finances were a reason (in other words, they felt they couldn’t afford to care for the child).
- 36 percent stated that it was bad timing to have a baby.
- 31 percent stated issues with their partner precipitated the abortion.

- 29 percent said they were terminating the pregnancy because they needed to focus on their other children.
- 19 percent said they were not emotionally or mentally prepared to be a parent.
- 12 percent said they couldn't provide a suitable life for a baby.
- 12 percent cited health-related issues.
- 7 percent said they were not mature or independent enough to have a baby.
- 5 percent said they were pressured by family or had the abortion to hide the pregnancy from family or friends.
- 4 percent said they didn't want a baby.

A similar study done in [2004 by Guttmacher Institute](#) found that the most frequently cited reason for having an abortion—given by 74 percent of the women—was that having a child would interfere with her education, work or ability to care for dependents.

The bottom line is that the vast majority of abortions are performed for reasons unrelated to the health of the mother or the fetus. Most abortions are performed because the parent or parents do not want, or feel they can care for, the child.

### **A deeper problem**

Abortion is a serious issue, but it is actually a symptom of much deeper societal and moral problems. The sad truth looming behind these statistics is the poor state of families in the Western world and the rejection of God's standards for sexual conduct.



Consider these three issues that are the root causes of the sin of abortion:

- 1. Sex outside of marriage.** Our culture promotes a “try before you buy” attitude about sex. But the Bible is clear that sex was designed to be only between a husband and wife for the purpose of bringing oneness within marriage and producing children (Genesis 1:28; 2:24). Studies also reveal that it’s mainly unmarried women who have abortions. Far too often the men who impregnate women abandon them or push them to get an abortion. Obeying God’s law to have sex only within the marital union would solve most of the issues that lead to abortion. Having sex and children within marriage is one key to [building strong families](#), healthy children and a strong society.
- 2. Sex-saturated culture.** Our culture promotes sexual promiscuity, pornography and lust-based entertainment as normal. Today’s children are rarely taught God’s standards about the sacredness of sex within the marriage union. Instead, the focus is on finding methods to avoid the consequences of unwanted pregnancies. Our world desperately needs to hear and understand the message of 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.”
- 3. The Bible is considered “outdated.”** Increasingly, the Bible is being marginalized, if not openly attacked, in our culture. Without God’s Word as a moral guide, our society has more and more “cast off restraint” (Proverbs 29:18). The main reason people reject the Bible is they want to live in a sinful way that contradicts it (John 3:19-20; Romans 1:28).

Such sins are so commonplace today that we have become like Judah of Jeremiah’s time: “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush” (Jeremiah 6:15).

Modern nations are following the same path Israel and Judah went down thousands of years ago. Instead of being ashamed of our sins, we celebrate them. After making the above statement, Jeremiah warned, “Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be cast down” (verse 15).

Sinful conduct inevitably brings punishment.

That is the bad news. But the good news is that God still offers hope. Every individual can repent and change his or her ways. If you are guilty of sex outside of marriage or have had an abortion, there is still hope for you. God is willing to show mercy and forgive you if you repent and change. He revealed through the prophet Ezekiel that this is His will: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

To learn more about repentance, see [“How to Repent.”](#)





Chapter 3

# The Biblical Path to Marriage

**A**lthough a growing number of young people are choosing to be single, most decide to marry. In the United States data from 2015 indicates that 96 percent of men and women marry at least once in their lives. As for young people, according to a 2013 Gallup poll, over 80 percent of people aged 18 to 34 in the United States reported that they were either married or would like to be married.

Although polls can yield contradictory results depending on the questions asked, the desire to share life with someone we love seems to be hardwired within us. But how does one find a mate? Some cultures have relied on arranged marriages, where some couples first meet only on their wedding day. That's a completely foreign concept in other societies, where people choose and decide for themselves. All approaches have had varying levels of success.

Today a newer experiment is underway: couples living together prior to marriage as a trial run to see if they are compatible. This practice has become so widespread that we're beginning to see results, so let's start by considering how this approach is working.

## Results of living together before marriage

While living under the same roof and experiencing the intimacy of sex prior to marriage may sound like a good idea, many studies about the "cohabitation effect" say otherwise. Couples who live together before marriage "tend to be less satisfied with their marriages—and more likely to divorce—than couples who do not" (Meg Jay, *The New York Times*, "The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage," April 14, 2012).

According to a 2019 article titled "[Essential Cohabitation Facts and Statistics](#)" by Sheri Stritof:

- "Living together is considered to be more stressful than being married."
- "Just over 50 percent of first cohabiting couples ever get married."
- "In the United States and in the UK, couples who live together are at a greater risk for divorce than non-cohabiting couples."
- "When evaluating relationships, couples who lived together before marriage tended to divorce early in their marriage. If their marriage lasts seven years, then their risk for divorce is the same as couples who didn't cohabit before marriage."

- “Cohabiting couples had a separation rate five times that of married couples and a reconciliation rate that was one-third that of married couples.
- “Cohabiting couples are more likely to experience infidelity.
- “Compared to those planning to marry, those cohabiting have an overall poorer relationship quality. They tend to have more fighting and violence and less reported happiness. . .
- “Compared to married individuals, those cohabiting have higher levels of depression and substance abuse.”

## **Children born to cohabiting parents**

When cohabiting couples have children, additional consequences come into play. The Institute for Family Studies examined data from the United States and 16 European countries and found that “children born into cohabiting families are more likely to see their parents split by age 12 than children born into married families in almost every country. This is also generally true across countries regardless of the mother’s education level” ([“World Family Map 2017”](#)).

Unfortunately, it is the children born to parents living together who often pay a heavy price. As the summary of the report concluded, “The retreat from marriage seems to decrease family stability for children in a wide variety of social contexts.”

In short, cohabitation is not good for adults who want to marry and stay married, nor is it good for children produced in such unions.

As we’ve noted, the Bible repeatedly instructs us not to commit fornication—not to have sex prior to marriage. As Paul put it, fornication is not “fitting” for people who are striving to please God (Ephesians 5:3).

The instruction for us not to live together prior to marriage is given to us for our good by our loving Heavenly Father. It is not arbitrary or unnecessarily restrictive. Our Creator knows what is best for us. For further study on cohabitation, see the online article [“Living Together Before Marriage”](#).

## **What to do and not do before marriage**

In God’s Word we find instruction on the godly approach to sex and marriage. The apostle Paul explained, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification [state of being considered holy and pure by God]: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4).





Photo: iStockphoto.com

Unmarried and married people are to live in an honorable way.

Those preparing for marriage are not to live “in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God. … For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (verses 5, 7). Sexual immorality—which includes having sex prior to marriage—was to be avoided.

God expects us to resist the temptation to have sex prior to marriage and focus on learning how to enter marriage “in sanctification and honor.” That means preparing spiritually, emotionally and physically, but reserving the sexual part of the relationship for marriage. This is the honorable, godly—and wisest—path to marriage. Experiencing the intimacy of sex before marriage can easily blind a couple to many other critically important aspects of the relationship.

## Getting to know someone before marriage

Since marriage is supposed to be a lifelong commitment, getting to know a prospective mate can be important, helping you make a sound decision about whether to marry that person or not. Learning about a person’s strengths, weaknesses and preferences can provide valuable information about what a person will probably be like as a spouse.

While no human is perfect, key character traits will become evident when people spend time with each other before marriage. One of the greatest investments you can make in your future marriage is taking the time to really get to know someone prior to marrying him or her.

## Traits to look for in a godly mate

If you are single and looking for a godly person to date and possibly marry, what should you look for? How do you measure the character of a godly man or woman?

One could examine many elements, but here are several basic questions to ask yourself about a person you might be interested in marrying. The following 10 questions are pulled from an article in *Discern* magazine.

**1. Does he or she show you love and respect?**

That might feel like an obvious question, but it's easy to mistake mutual attraction for mutual love and respect. Just because you like each other doesn't mean your relationship is anchored by these two essential qualities, so take some time to really think about it.

Paul told the congregation at Ephesus, "Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

We don't show love and respect by accident. They aren't things that just happen. To be consistent in these things, we have to be making a daily effort to express them—and to better understand what God says they mean. If the person you want to marry isn't actively showing you love and respect, then the foundation of your marriage will be crippled from day one.

**2. Are you moving toward the same goals?**

Amos asked, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). By entering into the marriage covenant with someone, you're agreeing to walk alongside him or her for the rest of your shared lives.

What do you want out of marriage? What do you want your home life to look like? What are your career goals? If you're each looking toward different destinations in life, your marriage will feel the strain. But if you're both headed the same direction, working with the same goals in mind and operating by the same values, your relationship will blossom and grow in the process.

**3. How does he or she handle stressful situations?**

It's easy to be the best version of ourselves when life is going well—and in the beginning of a relationship, there will be a lot of easygoing, stress-free moments. It might even seem like things will always be that way—but that's not how it works. Life will inject stress into your relationship, and it's important to know how your potential spouse handles it.

Early in our relationship, my (then future) wife and I took a wrong turn during a road trip, which led us to a grid of under-construction city streets. After sunset. In an urban area neither of us had been in before.

It was an eye-opening experience because we both saw how the other handled unexpected stress. We made it out of there alive and (relatively) unscathed, and our budding relationship was stronger because of it.

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,” says the book of Proverbs, “and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32). Marriage works better when the people in it know how to rule their spirits when times get tough—because they will get tough.

#### 4. How does he or she treat others?

One of the most important observations you can make about the person you’d like to marry is how he or she treats others—especially the ones who can’t really do anything about it. Cashiers. Waiters and waitresses. Employees. Total strangers. Anonymous users on the Internet. When there’s no repercussion for being rude or unkind, what kind of personality do you see on display?

Proverbs describes the ideal woman as someone who “extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20), and Jesus gave us the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12). Make sure your potential spouse is someone who extends kindness and compassion to others, even when there’s nothing to gain from it.

#### 5. What if nothing ever changes?

What’s the most annoying trait of your potential spouse-to-be?

Got it? Okay. Now, if that trait never changed—if you knew it was going to stay just as annoying and just as consistent for the rest of your human life—would you still want to marry this person?

It’s a dangerous game to go into marriage *expecting* your partner to change in

Marry someone  
whose dedication  
to living God’s  
way of life  
inspires you to  
do a better job  
in your own life.

a specific way. Sure, life is full of change, but for all you know, that specific trait might stay the same forever or even get worse. And if it does, are you going to be okay with that? Or is that a deal breaker? The marriage covenant is a very permanent thing (Matthew 19:9), so it's important that we don't bank on change that might never happen.

**6. How focused is he or she on self-improvement?**

In contrast to the last question, being a Christian means a commitment to change. Following God means seeking out where we're falling short of His expectations and learning how to do better.

One of the qualities any potential spouse should have is the desire to improve as God reveals areas that need work. Make sure you're looking to enter into marriage with someone who makes the effort to grow as a Christian.

**7a. Women: Is this a man you can follow and support, even when you disagree with him?**

Paul wrote an instruction that can be hard to swallow: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24).

But there it is. In the marriage relationship, part of the wife's role is to submit to her husband. Women, that doesn't mean you're not allowed to voice your concerns or express your hopes as your husband leads. It doesn't mean you're expected to become some kind of mindless slave or submit to things contrary to God's instruction. But marriage does mean committing to following where your husband leads, even when you think another direction might work better.

Make sure you marry a man you're not concerned about having to follow.

**7b. Men: Is this a woman whose input you will value and consider, even when you disagree with her?**

Paul had something to say to the husbands too: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). It's that last part that often gets overlooked. Men, our job is to love our wives *as Christ loves the Church*. That's a deep kind of love—a love filled with self-sacrifice and unflinching dedication. A husband should make decisions that place higher value on his wife and family than himself.

Even though it's our responsibility to take the reins of the relationship, we're not the boss or the dictator. We're the husband, and we are to give "honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being *heirs together* of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

Make sure you marry a woman whose thoughts and opinions will help you make better decisions as a leader.

See more on the topic of men's and women's roles in chapter 4.

#### **8. What's his or her relationship with God?**

More tough words from Paul: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

That's not optional. That's not a matter of preference. That's not a suggestion, a hope or a best-case scenario. This goes back to having the same goals. If the person you're interested in doesn't believe in God or in living His way of life, how can you expect to walk together?

Or if that belief or that way of life is just something on the back burner, something that gets pushed aside in favor of other things, do you think the command to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18) is going to be easier or harder for you?

Marry someone whose dedication to living God's way of life inspires you to do a better job in your own life.

#### **9. Is he or she willing to put God before you?**

Ah. Now we're into really difficult territory. This isn't the picture Hollywood paints when it talks about romance—or all the inspirational quotes on social media, for that matter. The world around us says true love is finding someone who makes you the focal point of his or her entire universe, who puts you before anything else.

Marriage is a lot of things, but it's not that. Not in a million years.

God was serious when He said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). It wasn't a joke. Nothing—*nothing*, not even your cherished wife or husband—was to come between you and your relationship with God (Deuteronomy 13:6-8).

Jesus also emphasized that God is to come first when He spoke His famous words, “But seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

When we lose sight of who comes first in our life, the other areas of our life are bound to come undone in the process. “All these things”—all the blessings and benefits of life, which include marriage—come second to God.

If you want a successful marriage, make sure you’re looking for someone who will put God first—and you second.

#### **10. What’s your relationship with God?**

But then, all this assumes one very important point—that God matters to *you* too. That you’re making the effort to put Him first in *your* life. That *you* treat others with compassion. That *you’re* making the effort to improve and grow as a child of God. Because, well, it’s a two-way street—if you’re asking these questions about the person you want to marry, then hopefully the person you want to marry will be asking these same questions about you.

Whether you’ve had someone in mind as you’ve made your way through this list or you’re still searching for that special someone, one of the best things you can do is to start making sure you can measure up to the questions on this list too. It’s a lifelong project, and there’s always room for each of us to continue improving ourselves—both for our own sake and for our spouse’s.

The book of Proverbs tells us that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22), and again, “Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD” (Proverbs 19:14).

Marriage, entered into by the right people and for the right reasons, is an incredible blessing from God, and it’s never too early (or too late) to start preparing for it.

For more on this, check out our online articles “[5 Traits Men Should Look for in a Godly Woman](#)” and “[5 Traits Women Should Look for in a Godly Man](#).”

### **The benefits of premarital counseling**

While you can learn much about a potential mate by spending time with that person and discovering the answers to the questions posed above, another practice can also be extremely beneficial—premarital counseling.

Talking with a minister or counselor about what to anticipate and prepare for, both before and after getting married, is a concrete way to equip you and your future spouse to have greater success in your life together as husband and wife.

Good counseling will help you explore marriage issues such as:

- Realistic versus idealistic expectations.
- Family background and characteristics.
- Personality and temperament differences.
- Communication.
- Conflict resolution and problem solving.
- The roles each will assume within the family structure.
- Financial management.
- Balancing time with family, friends and leisure activities.
- Children and parenting.
- Sexual relations.
- Spiritual compatibility.

The odds of building a marriage with a high degree of peace and happiness improve significantly if you address and understand all these issues before you get married! For additional explanation, see the article “[The Importance of Premarital Counseling](#).”





# Chapter 4

# *Marriage as God Intended*

# T

he traditional structure of marriage with the husband being the head of the family has been extensively criticized in recent years. In the 1950s television programs such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* generally featured fathers in positive roles as providers and leaders of their families.

Today husbands are more often portrayed in sitcoms as incompetent, selfish and immature compared to their wives and children. Many now believe that fathers are detrimental to smooth-functioning families or, if not detrimental, simply not necessary. Many now disdain the very thought that husbands should lead.

Why did this view of husbands change so quickly? Partly because many husbands have not treated their wives and families the way God intended. And part of the answer lies in the fact that an evil spirit called “the Devil and Satan” has deceived most of humanity into thinking that God’s instructions—including those regarding marriage—produce bondage and misery (Revelation 12:9; 20:2).

Are God’s instructions about marriage flawed? Or have people simply misunderstood what the Bible teaches? Let’s take a careful look at the roles of husbands and wives as taught by God’s Word.

## Spiritual symbolism of marriage

After citing God’s instruction from the beginning that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh,” Paul wrote, “this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32). There is much for us to consider when we compare marriage to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

This comparison teaches us that God desires marriage to be a very special relationship between a husband and wife—one similar to the relationship between Christ and the Church. Paul uses this comparison as he instructs husbands and wives on how they should interact with each other.

An important point here is how special God desires marriage to be. His wish is for a husband and wife to strive to live up to the highest ideals in their relationships with Christ and each other.

Marriage between a man and a woman, with its accompanying opportunity to produce children, is also a type of what God is doing. God is described in the Bible as a family. We are told that the head of this family is God the “*Father*”

(Matthew 6:6, 8-9) who is assisted by His “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17)—the resurrected Jesus Christ. Note the familial terms *father* and *son*.

Writing to Church members in Ephesus, Paul said, “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14-15). The purpose for Jesus’ coming to earth to die for our sins is so we might “become children of God” (John 1:12). The desire of the Father and the Son is that They might bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

## **Jesus affirms God’s family**

While the account of Jesus’ coming to die for our sins is well-known, many have overlooked His teaching about God’s family. In addition to the passages noted above, Jesus also revealed much about the family of God in His interaction with His disciples.

On multiple occasions Jesus referred to His followers as *brethren*. Defining what He meant, Jesus said, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21; compare Matthew 12:48-50).

The book of Hebrews similarly explains: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many *sons* to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them *brethren*, saying: ‘I will declare Your name to My *brethren*; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.’ And again: ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again: ‘Here am I and the *children* whom God has given Me’” (Hebrews 2:10-13).

## **Paul affirms God’s family**

In his letter to the Galatians Paul uses an analogy to compare what it meant to be a son in the first century to the relationship Christians have with God. Though social customs and perspectives have changed, the concept of Christians being part of the family of God is clear.

As Paul wrote, “And because you are *sons*, God has sent forth the Spirit of His *Son* into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a *son*, and if a *son*, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:6-7).

In explaining to the members in Rome the significance of having God’s Holy Spirit, Paul similarly wrote, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are

A vertical photograph on the right side of the page showing a close-up of a person's skin-toned arm and hand. The hand is holding an open book, with the pages visible. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the paper.

*sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:14-15).*

The words *Abba* and *Father* have the same meaning. The former is Aramaic, which was the language of the home in first-century Judea. The use of this term reflects the close family relationship Jesus had with His Father and the close relationship we can likewise have with our spiritual Father.

## **The gospel**

The story of how God calls and works with humans so they might become spirit members of the divine family of God is called the gospel—the good news—of the coming Kingdom of God. This is the central message of the Bible. It is the reason we humans were created. It is the message Jesus preached while He was here on earth (Mark 1:14-15).

Biblical marriage is not just a casual union. Instead, God created it with the desire that it be honorable, respectful and loving. Recognizing the spiritual depth and meaning of marriage, the late Herbert W. Armstrong, who wrote extensively on the topic of marriage throughout his 20th-century ministry, often referred to marriage as a “God-plane relationship.”

Marriage is not just for the purpose of procreation or companionship, but was ordained by God and was designed to teach us spiritual lessons about Him and what He is doing. Physical marriage as God intended thus mirrors God’s plan to build His spiritual family.

For additional information about the Godhead, see our free booklet *Getting to Know the God of the Bible*. To learn more about why God created us, see our free booklet *God’s Purpose for You*. If you would like to learn more about the gospel of the Kingdom, see the booklet *The Mystery of the Kingdom* and the article series that begins with “*Messiah’s Message: The Gospel of the Kingdom*.”



## Husbands are to be respected

Speaking to wives, Paul said, “Submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

A husband’s role as head of the family shows God’s intention that the husband be the leader and protector of the family. This does not give a husband the freedom to be a tyrant or misuse his authority. Instead, he is to lead the family the way Christ leads the Church—in a loving, caring and benevolent manner, always making the decisions in the best interests of his wife and children.

Paul’s instruction for wives to “submit” to their husbands can sound disrespectful of women to modern ears, but that was not the context or the meaning of his statement. Views on marriage held by Jews, Greeks and Romans in the first century were a stark contrast to what Paul was advocating.

“The Jews had a low view of women. In his morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man gave thanks that God had not made him ‘a Gentile, a slave or a woman.’ In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely her husband’s possession to do with as he willed” (*Barclay’s Daily Study Bible*).

In the ancient Greek world, visiting prostitutes was considered normal, even for married men. Wives in the respectable classes lived secluded lives raising children and running the home, but husbands found their sexual pleasure and companionship elsewhere. Greek men were educated; women were not, except for the temple prostitutes (*ibid.*).

“In Rome the matter was still worse; its degeneracy was tragic. For the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic there had been not one single case of divorce. ... But at the time of Paul, Roman family life

was wrecked. Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. ... The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown” (*ibid.*).

Paul’s explanation of marriage elevated the relationship between husbands and wives to a much higher level than the standards that existed in the Jewish, Greek and Roman communities.

Paul’s instruction for a wife to submit to her husband was something a wife voluntarily chose to do because of respect for her husband. It did not mean that she had to submit to all other men or that she was a lower-class person. To the contrary, when God considers our spiritual state, “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus ... and heirs according to the promise” (*Galatians 3:28*).

Although husbands and wives have different roles within marriage, their spiritual reward is the same. They are joint heirs in Christ (*Romans 8:17*).

Put in simple terminology, Paul’s instructions for wives meant that they were to *respect* their husbands as the leaders of their families. Summarizing his instructions to couples, Paul wrote, “Let the wife see that she *respects* her husband” (*Ephesians 5:33*). A husband who is leading his family according to God’s principles will strive to make this easy for his wife.

## **Wives are to be loved**

Paul also said, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (verses 25-27).

Christ’s love for the Church—which included giving His life for her—is the example husbands are to strive to imitate in their relationships with their wives. This means being willing to sacrifice their own wants and desires because of their love for their wives and families. Christ did not act like a selfish tyrant in His relationship with the Church—neither should husbands with their wives.

Expounding on the beautiful, loving, respectful relationship husbands should have with their wives, Paul continued, “So husbands ought to love their own wives

**This kind of relationship between a husband and wife—one based on love and respect—is what God desires for all who marry.**

as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (verses 28-31).

In these verses Paul likens the loving intimacy husbands should have for their wives to the love Christ has for each member of the Church. In saying “he who loves his wife loves himself,” Paul was telling husbands that being godly husbands will make life better and happier, not just for their wives, but also for themselves.

## A blessing from God

Peter also upheld Paul’s instructions regarding godly marriage. He wrote, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

To the husbands, Peter wrote, “Dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (verse 7).

This kind of relationship between a husband and wife—one based on love and respect—is what God desires for all who marry. The primary reason so many marriages fail is that one or both parties fail to practice these principles. But when God’s basic standards for husbands and wives are honored and put into practice, marriage can be one of life’s greatest experiences and a wonderful blessing from God.





## Chapter 5

# *Making Marriage Last*



arriage counselors and sociologists have identified multiple keys for building a good marriage. These keys have often been gleaned through observing couples who have happy marriages and counseling couples going through relationship problems. It is interesting that almost all of the keys to having a happy, successful marriage—both things to practice and things to avoid—fall under the major concepts of love and respect addressed by Paul.

Marriage can be likened to a garden. Similar to the way plants need to be tended with fertilizer and water, marriages need to be nurtured in order for them to thrive. Let's consider a few of the keys for making your marriage grow and thrive.

## Strive to have good communication

Most people know that communication is vital for a healthy marriage, but what is really needed is *good* communication—not just any kind of communication. Giving each other the silent treatment communicates a lot, but it's not good! Verbal communication is even more powerful. As Proverbs 18:21 states, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”

Paul said that we should speak “what is good for necessary edification [*building up, or encouraging*], that it may impart grace [*favor, or positive benefits*] to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

James gave principles that apply to the words we speak: “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

When this wisdom governs our communication in marriage, we choose our words carefully. We don't say things that tear down our spouse. We are not constantly critical. When we need to bring up a problem—and every marriage has things that need to be discussed instead of buried—we preface our words with a reassurance of our love and respect for our spouse.

Wives will start their communication with their husbands about a problem with words to the effect of “Honey, I respect you and appreciate all that you do for me and our family. I know that you love me, but ...” Husbands will start their communication with their wives about a problem with words to the effect of “Dear, you know that I love you and appreciate all that you do for me and our family, but ...”

Additionally, it is important not to talk in generalities. Have you ever heard someone accuse his or her spouse of *always* doing something wrong or *never* doing something right? That can immediately make the other person defensive. It is far better to explain the effect. For example, say something like, “When you do this, I feel ...” That doesn’t place blame on your spouse, but helps him or her understand the impact of the specific action.

With a gentle, respectful entrance into a discussion regarding a problem, couples are far more likely to be willing to acknowledge how they have each contributed to the problem and how they can make changes that will preserve and strengthen their relationship.

It takes character and discipline to carefully choose our words when we are emotionally distraught, but doing so demonstrates to our spouse our commitment to our relationship. In order to make sure we don’t do more harm than good, sometimes we may need to take some time to calm down and pray about and reflect upon a situation before we speak with our spouse about it.

Praying together has also proven to be an especially helpful way for couples to strengthen their marriages. When a spouse hears his or her partner ask God to bless their marriage and help him or her be a better mate, he or she is encouraged to do the same.

## Appreciate your spouse’s differences

Every human being is different. Each of us has our own strengths, weaknesses, preferences and idiosyncrasies. When we marry, we link our lives with another complex being with his or her own unique set of these qualities. Instead of getting upset with our spouse’s preferences and ways of doing things—assuming they are legal and godly—we can learn to appreciate them.

Peter admonished husbands to “live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7, English Standard Version). This means a husband needs to seek to understand his wife’s feelings and needs and honor her as his partner for life and a fellow heir of God’s Kingdom.

## Protect your own unique relationship

It is important for a husband and wife to protect their special relationship. The biblical instruction from the beginning is that “a man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

This means that when two people marry, their relationship is a new, autonomous family unit. They leave behind their parents and make their own plans and decisions. Advice from family members and friends can be helpful, but the new couple needs to remember that their relationship takes higher priority than those with others.

To be “joined to his wife” and “become one flesh” means they are to be intimately connected to each other in a way they are with nobody else. This occurs through both their sexual relationship and their mental and emotional intimacy as they grow in love and respect for each other.

When a husband and wife have children, a common mistake is allowing their focus on their children to take priority over their relationship with each other. One of children’s greatest needs is for Mom and Dad to keep their marriage relationship rock-solid. It is the foundation of their family.

When parents have a healthy relationship, their children feel safe and secure. In such an environment, children also learn what a good marriage is like. And with a healthy relationship, a couple’s marriage will not fall apart when their children leave home.

## Have fun with your spouse

It may seem strange to say this, but if you aren’t having fun in your marriage, your relationship is in danger. The joy of doing things together is likely what allowed your love to grow in the beginning. Doing fun things together after you are married will help keep you from drifting apart and help to strengthen your relationship.

Have a date night on a regular basis. Travel. Explore the outdoors. Take dance lessons. Make up things to celebrate. The list of things to do for fun can go on and on, but whatever you do, make sure you continue to court each other. Doing these kinds of things will keep your marriage from becoming boring and monotonous—which can sow the seeds of bigger marriage problems down the line.

Those romantic feelings that were such an important part of your relationship before marriage need to continue after you are married. Even little things like “I





“love you” notes or words of affection help keep relationships vibrant and enjoyable.

Wise King Solomon summed up the have-fun principle like this: “*Live joyfully* with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

## Determine to always be honest and trustworthy

Honesty and trustworthiness go hand in hand toward solidifying a marriage. Lying destroys trust! Even if one apologizes, there may still be lingering doubts as to whether he or she is being honest this time.

Sadly, lying seems to be commonplace. “According to a 2002 study conducted by the University of Massachusetts, 60% of adults can’t have a ten-minute conversation without lying at least once” ([Mentalfloss.com](http://Mentalfloss.com), May 7, 2012). No

wonder Paul pointedly wrote, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9).

Being honest all the time can be hard, but the effort is definitely worth it. When spouses are honest with each other—even when it is difficult—they build intimacy. Spouses know they can believe what the other is saying.

Being honest also sets a good example for children. When children see their parents always being honest, they can learn to be honest themselves.

Spouses who are honest with each other do not have extramarital sexual affairs. While popular culture would have us believe that affairs occur because two people just happen to fall in love, the truth is that these sinful relationships are not accidents, they aren’t based on love, and they are often the death knell of marriages. Extramarital sex is a choice and is always based on *lust*—not love. And it is a sin (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18)!

Fundamentally, affairs take place because of selfishness. Risking the destruction of a family for momentary sexual satisfaction is most definitely not showing love to those who stand to be negatively affected.

When it comes to sex, the Bible teaches us not to withhold this intimacy from our spouse with one exception. As Paul candidly explained, “Do not deprive one

another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

## Additional resources

The admirable character traits we have just covered, when implemented, make it easier for spouses to love and respect each other. They also make marriage more enjoyable and protect the entire family.

For additional information, download your own free copy of [\*5 Keys to Improving Your Marriage\*](#). For encouraging examples of how real couples have worked to implement these principles in their marriages, see the article “[\*\*How Great Marriages Work\*\*](#).”

For things to avoid in your marriage, see the article “[\*\*Four Lethal Marriage Problems\*\*](#).” The “[\*\*Marriage\*\*](#)” section of our LifeHopeandTruth.com website also has many other related articles.

## A few final words

A marriage built on God’s principles can be one of the greatest joys of life. The book of Proverbs notes that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” and “a prudent wife is from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22; 19:14).

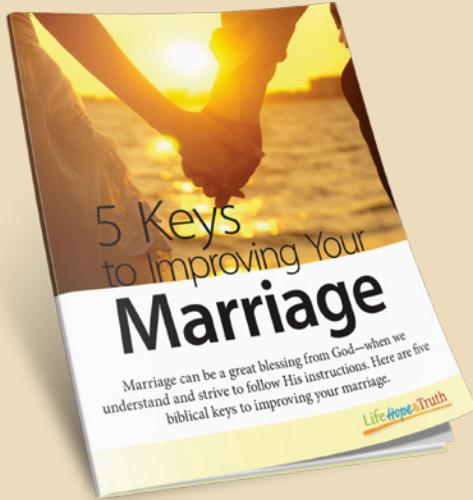
A godly marriage can also produce further blessings. Psalm 127:3 says, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward.”

This is the kind of marriage that God says is “honorable” (Hebrews 13:4).

If you are not yet married and wish to be, we hope the biblical instruction in this booklet will enlighten you to the godly way to seek a mate. If you are married, we hope the information covered will help you and your spouse have a rich and rewarding relationship.



**God wants  
you to have  
a happy  
marriage!**



**These five biblical keys will help couples:**

- Identify the central focus of the most successful marriages.
- Appreciate and harmonize their differences.
- Help each other grow.
- Deepen the three dimensions of love.
- Defuse the marriage killers.

**Download this free study guide at**

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# About Life Hope & Truth

LifeHopeandTruth.com exists to fill a critical void in this world: the lack of understanding about the purpose of life, the lack of realistic hope for a better future and the lack of truth!

Neither religion nor science has satisfactorily addressed these issues, so people today are of divided opinions, confused or, worst of all, don't care anymore. The ancient words of the prophet Isaiah ring so true today: "Truth is fallen in the street." Why? Is it because God was right when He warned that humans are inclined to reject Him and usually choose not to know Him?

We are here for people who are searching for answers, who are ready to prove all things or who are hungry for more than what they've been taught most of their lives about God, the Bible, the meaning of life and how to live. We want to help you truly understand the good news of the gospel and fulfill Jesus Christ's admonition to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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