

MARRIAGE

To Have and to Hold

Why do some marriages endure and others not? Why do some couples struggle and others not? What one factor makes the greatest difference and prevents so many marriages from failing? It's the word covenant.

The concept of covenant is a long, winding path that ends when "death do us part." The marriage covenant is a couple's lifetime commitment—a lifetime journey of love and loyalty. Jesus states it well: "They are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

WHAT IS GOD'S PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE?

Marriage is a covenant agreement in which a man and a woman are legally and spiritually joined together as husband and wife. And Genesis 2:24-25 establishes the four elements in God's perfect order for marriage.

Separation—“a man will leave his father and mother”

Both the husband and wife leave the authority of their parents and become a separate family unit. In marriage the loyalty to your parents should never be stronger than the loyalty to your spouse.

Bonding— “and be united to his wife”

By an act of your will, bonding is a mental commitment to have a faithful, permanent marriage relationship with your spouse regardless of difficulties.

Oneness— “they will become one flesh”

Physical oneness is the ultimate consummation of sexual closeness. For this sexual oneness to be continually mutually satisfying, look for ways to express unselfish love to each other. Openly ask, “What best communicates love to you?” and then take the time to enjoy one another.

Intimacy— “they felt no shame”

Emotional intimacy is encouraged when you seek to be vulnerable and transparent, honestly sharing with one another your feelings of frustration and failure, your deepest disappointments and desires. Spiritual intimacy is achieved when you continue to reveal to one another your unmet needs, praying together, praying for each other and sharing what God is doing in your lives.

WHAT ARE GOD'S PURPOSES FOR MARRIAGE?

God has a unique purpose for marriage. In the same way that Christ sacrificially gave Himself to the church, you and your mate should be willing to sacrifice your individual desires for the sake of your marriage covenant.

Partnership

God has given you each other as partners for life—true companionship grows when there is emotional, spiritual and physical unity. Malachi 2:14 emphasizes, “She is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

Parenting

God’s first scriptural command was for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth with godly offspring. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:28).

Pleasure

The marriage relationship and your mate are God’s special gifts to you...true enjoyment will grow out of self-control and a servant’s heart. Proverbs 5:18 says, “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18).

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FIVE KINDS OF TROUBLED MARRIAGES?

God uses marriage as a chisel to chip away your character flaws. He intends both partners to move from selfish to sacrificial behavior, reflecting the sacrificial love of Christ. The Make-believe Marriage—lacking honest and intimate communication by...

- not working through problems (stubbornness)
- not accepting responsibility (defensiveness)
- not acknowledging your mate’s feelings (rejection)
- not concerned about your mate’s needs (self-centeredness)
- not displaying affection (apathy)

Make-believe marriages are marriages in name only. To enjoy intimate communication is to be as concerned about your partner’s needs as about your own. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”

The Maladjusted Marriage—experiencing sexual difficulties because of...

- frigidity (fearfulness)—from false guilt, sexual abuse, psychological problems
- impatience (insensitivity)—being demanding, coercive
- infidelity (selfishness)—indulging in adultery, pornography
- fatigue (exhaustion)—caused by excessive busyness or overcommitment
- anger (bitterness)—unforgiveness, manipulation

Maladjusted marriages fail to experience the unique expression of physical oneness. As an act of love, God’s design is that both partners yield their bodies to one another. True sexual fulfillment comes through seeking to provide pleasure to the other. The Bible says, “The

husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

The Mixed-up Marriage—having conflicting values over...

- opposing religious beliefs
- opposing parental responsibilities
- opposing marital commitments
- opposing friendship choices
- opposing moral principles

Mixed-up marriages produce power struggles, tension, and criticism. With basic values in conflict, the couple has great difficulty developing oneness of mind, heart, and will. However, Philippians 2:2 says, "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

The Money-troubled Marriage—experiencing financial disagreements over...

- how family income will be earned...and spent
- how credit cards will be used
- how credit card misuse will be handled
- how the budget will be followed
- how the lack of money for essentials will be handled

Conflicting answers to these questions and other financial difficulties can result in an unhealthy focus on money and material needs. However Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."

The Misaligned Marriage—failing to recognize/respond to God-given roles

Failure of the husband...

- to be a spiritual leader
- to be financially responsible
- to make wise decisions
- to seek to solve problems
- to be attentive to his wife

Failure of the wife...

- by not having a gentle spirit
- by trying to control her husband
- by becoming involved in power struggles
- by withdrawing emotionally
- by being bitter and sarcastic

God's design is for the husband to feel significant through providing for his family and receiving the respectful love of his wife.² He fulfills her need to feel secure through his love, acceptance, and sensitivity to her desires. Ephesians 5 paints the picture:

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (EPHESIANS 5:22-23,25).

WHAT ARE COMMON CAUSES OF BROKEN MARRIAGES?

Many enter marriage expecting "personal payoffs." Eventually, these unrealistic expectations become lost hopes and dreams that grow a root of bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 states, "See to it...that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

Couples expect marriage will always provide...

- love and acceptance
- affection and sexual intimacy
- a loving family
- rescue from present circumstances
- financial security
- social acceptance
- protection from loneliness
- time to change a mate's behavior

When these unrealistic expectations are unfulfilled, many spouses say,

- "Life is too short to live like this. We'll both be happier apart."
- "This was not a marriage made in heaven. We should never have married."
- "I've tried everything—our situation is hopeless."
- "You're wrong. You'll never change!"
- "Everybody's getting divorced—marriage doesn't matter anymore."
- "It's better for the children if I leave, to protect them from the arguing."
- "I'll never be happy here, but I'll try to stay until the children are grown."

Instead of living with unrealistic expectations regarding what you don't have, be grateful to God for what you do have. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

WHAT IS THE KEY VERSE TO MEMORIZE?

Submission is based on your love for the Lord and your desire to do His will. Because of your love for God, you both must learn to defer to the desires of each other. Ephesians 5:21 says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

WHAT UNIQUE LONGINGS DO HUSBANDS AND WIVES HAVE?

Although everyone has three God-given inner needs—for love, significance, and security³—God designed the husband to have a greater need for significance, while the wife is uniquely created with a deeper need for security. A crucial element in the marriage relationship is becoming aware of your partner's desires and learning to meet them creatively.⁴ Philippians 2:4 says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

How Wives Fulfill Their Husbands' Desires

Admiration (Proverbs 31:23)

- Praise his positive character traits.
- Respect his burden of responsibility.

Domestic Support (Proverbs 31:27)

- Provide a peaceful home atmosphere.
- Manage the home efficiently.

Companionship (Mark 10:8)

- Develop mutual interests together.
- Learn to talk knowledgeably about your husband's occupation.

Attractiveness (Proverbs 31:25)

- Develop inner beauty that earns respect.
- Display inner strength regardless of outward circumstances.

Sexual Fulfillment (1 Corinthians 7:4-5)

- Communicate your sexual desires.
- Give assurance that your husband is sexually adequate.

How Husbands Fulfill Their Wives' Desires

Affection (Song of Solomon 1:2; 2:6)

- Give hugs, kisses, cards, flowers, and gifts.
- Tell her how much you care for her.

Communication (Ephesians 4:29)

- Listen with concern and interest.
- Encourage and praise her positive character traits.

Honesty (Proverbs 24:26)

- Commit to total truthfulness.
- Share your true thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Financial Security (1 Timothy 5:8)

- Shoulder the financial responsibility.
- Prepare a budget together to plan for the future.

Commitment (Hebrews 13:4)

- Schedule quality and quantity time alone with her.
- Make your wife and family your highest earthly priority.

MAKING A GOOD MARRIAGE GREAT!

A husband and wife must never lose their commitment to each other. This commitment to both your mate and your marriage goes deeper than romantic love. It empowers you to keep an unbreakable covenant with your marriage partner regardless of unexpected circumstances. Our covenant God says to us, “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion” (Hosea 2:19).

My Covenant Commitment

(Note the acrostic for C-O-V-E-N-A-N-T)

C Commit to working through problems and not walking away (1 Corinthians 7:27).

- Decide together that divorce is not an option.
- Agree to communicate feelings honestly and lovingly.

O Offer love to your mate even when you don't feel like it (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

- Evaluate how your love compares to that described in 1 Corinthians 13. Substitute your name in the place of the word “love” in verses 4-8.
- Pray daily for those who have hurt you—forgive and forgive again—refusing to keep a record of wrongs.

V View your marriage as God's setting for spiritual growth (Proverbs 15:13).

- Realize that God did not create any one person to meet all your needs.
- While God is your ultimate need-meeter, see your mate as God's gift to meet some of those needs.

E Eliminate any emphasis on your rights (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

- Identify what makes you angry.
- Sensitively express your honest desires—“It would mean a lot to me if you would take out the trash.”

N Nurture your identity in Christ (Philippians 4:13).

- Evaluate if your sense of self-worth is based on how your mate treats you.
- Acknowledge that your true identity is in Christ, not in your mate.

A Ask God to change you (Psalm 51:10).

- Evaluate what areas in your life need changing.
- Ask your mate, “Would you name one area in my life where you feel I need the most change?”

N Nourish your extended family relationships (Exodus 20:12).

- Evaluate the tangible and emotional needs of your in-laws.
- Consistently look for the positive in your mate’s family.

T Turn your expectations over to God (Psalm 62:1).

- Evaluate the unrealistic expectations you’ve had of marriage and your mate.
- Realize God can bring complete fulfillment to you regardless of your marriage partner.
“My soul finds rest in God alone” (PSALM 62:1).

To make the most of your marriage, the key to success is commitment. While fortunes change from good to bad and feelings move from glad to sad, commitment is the highest goal... commitment is the glue that holds. —JH

Your Scripture Prayer Project

Ephesians 5:21

1 Corinthians 7:3-4

1 Corinthians 13:4-5

1 Corinthians 13:6-7

Philippians 2:2-4

1 Peter 3:7

Ephesians 5:25

Mark 10:9

Source: Counselling through your Bible Handbook, by June Hunt, Harvest House Publishers, Oregon, 2008, pp 269-278