

## **South Ridge Community Church: Statement of Vision for Marriage**

Marriage is a gift from God and an especially significant part of His vision for humanity. The Bible both begins and ends with a marriage. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, just after God creates the first woman (Eve), He brings her to the first man (Adam) and gives her to Adam to be his wife. The narrator explains: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh” (Genesis 1:22-24). Similarly, in the last book of the Bible, history culminates with “the wedding supper of the Lamb,” a symbolic picture of Jesus’ followers (His bride) being united to Him forever (Revelation 19:9; 21:9). From first to last, the Bible emphasizes the priority of marriage. Why is marriage so significant to God?

There are several reasons why marriage is significant to God.

**Marriage Provides Companionship to the People God Created:** Though God had given Adam meaningful work to do, Adam was unfulfilled because there was no other human being with whom he could share life. Adam experienced an internal relational vacancy that couldn’t be satisfied through activity (even meaningful, God-glorifying activity). It could only be satisfied through meaningful human connection. Genesis describes God’s motivation for creating a wife for Adam: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’” (Genesis 2:18a). Marriage was the avenue through which God provided companionship and meaningful human connection.

Many who choose not to marry still experience relationships of deep connection and commitment (such as Jesus, while He was on earth). Marriage, though, is the only relationship that the Bible describes as becoming “one flesh.” Marriage was designed to provide a unique quality of companionship and commitment between one man and one woman that no other relationship is able to provide. Marriage is the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical joining of two lives. It is the supreme expression of God’s loving desire for human beings to experience joy through deep intimacy with each other.

**Marriage is a Primary Way God Shapes People:** God uses marriage to bring transformation to the lives of both husband and wife. Though many who are not married experience growth through relationships, marriage is the most intensely transformational relationship. As a greenhouse provides the ideal conditions for plants to grow, marriage provides the relational context with the highest potential for the people within that relationship to grow. This is because marriage is a “covenant” relationship. That is to say, marriage is the only relationship in which people vow to unconditionally love, no matter what change or hardship may occur.

When other relationships become difficult or go through challenging times, either party is free to walk away. In a marriage, both parties have promised ahead of time, not only to stay, but to love, honor, and cherish the other until death.

In modern society, people often speak of the commitment of marriage vows as a constraint; rather, the vows of commitment in marriage are a gift from God. The promise to stay, remain committed to the marriage, and continue to pursue oneness (especially when a

person feels the impulse to run) creates a context of safety in which the Holy Spirit stretches each spouse's capacity to give and receive love.

Paul writes, "Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord... Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:21-22, 25a). Living out this vision of mutual submission and sacrifice is a monumental challenge. It can't be done quickly. Neither can it be done without deep dependence on God.

Marriage provides a context of ongoing grace and safety for people to grow in their capacity to love like Jesus loves, through the power of the Holy Spirit. When people love their spouses well, even when it's not easy, they see with fresh clarity that they have been created to love and are strengthened for the task by God's indwelling Spirit. When people fail to love their spouses well, but receive love from their spouse in return, they learn that they are worthy of love and see with fresh eyes the unconditional nature of God's love.

Marriage is a greenhouse for growth because it is the only relationship in which two people are "naked" but feel "no shame" (Genesis 2:25). Incredible potential for deep transformation grows from this context of safety, which is a direct result of the vow to love, honor, and cherish until death.

This is one of the reasons that South Ridge holds the position that cohabitation is not a part of God's vision for His creation. Living together before marriage creates a context of vulnerability for a man and a woman without the protection of the commitment (To find out more about South Ridge's convictions on cohabitation, see South Ridge's *Statement of Position Related to Cohabitation*).

**Marriage Reveals God's Design of Beauty in Diversity.** In Genesis, God's stated purpose for creating Eve is to "make a helper suitable for [Adam]" (Genesis 2:18b). The Hebrew word *ezer* (translated "helper") may be better translated "strong helper" or possibly "helping counterpart." David Wilkinson captures the point well, commenting that, in this passage, "...the helped is not sufficient alone..." (*The Message of Creation*, 58). The strengths of the helper and the strengths of helped come together to create a beautiful and complimentary whole. Marriage is unity in diversity. It is the lives of two equal, but uniquely shaped people being melded together into oneness.

As these two unique shapes meld together in every way, people see a visible representation of the invisible love that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In John 17, Jesus prays for all those who will follow Him down through the generations. His prayer to the Father is "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...". Jesus says that diverse personalities uniting around His cause powerfully demonstrate the "unity in diversity" that exists within the Trinity. Of everything God has created, marriage most vividly displays the beautiful, multi-faceted nature of God. When two separate and uniquely shaped persons are united through marriage, people can see more clearly that God exists as three separate and uniquely shaped persons bound together in love.

Marriage, therefore, is not merely or primarily for the purpose of self-expression or self-fulfillment. It is a primary way that God reveals who He is. Furthermore, South Ridge believes that, according to Scripture, God intends to display His beauty as "unity in diversity" by designing marriage to be the union of one man and one woman - two

biologically and emotionally distinct people, united with each other. While same-sex marriage demonstrates “sameness and sameness” coming together, God designed marriage to reveal “distinctness and distinctness” coming together to create a beautiful whole that’s greater than the sum of its parts. Scripture clearly teaches in Genesis 1 & 2 that God brings male and female together in marriage. He has also uniquely designed two distinct genders to be united as one flesh to mirror the oneness and diversity of their Creator, who is three-in-one. For both of these reasons, South Ridge believes that marriage is designed by God to be a covenant commitment between one man and one woman.

**Marriage is a Conduit for Physical and Spiritual Life to Flow to God’s Creation:**

After God created Adam and Eve, he commissioned them saying, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...”. Sex was created to be a beautiful celebration of covenant oneness. God also designed sex to populate the earth and provide care for His creation through human stewardship. It was created for *both* pleasure *and* procreation. This touches on another reason that South Ridge has the conviction that same-sex marriage is a departure from God’s original design. In same sex marriages, there can be sexual pleasure, but no procreation.

While South Ridge recognizes that procreation is not always possible in heterosexual marriages due to physical limitation, inability to conceive, etc., we believe the potentiality for procreation was an inherent aspect of God’s original design for the sexual relationship in a marriage between one man and one woman. One of God’s primary purposes in creating marriage was to be to produce new life and new image-bearers who would spread His goodness and grace to the ends of creation.

In the ancient world, statues were created “in the image” of a King. These statues represented the King throughout the Kingdom. As beings created “in the image” of their Creator, Adam and Eve’s purpose was to be His life-giving representatives. This involved physically reproducing to fill the earth with God’s image-bearers. It also involved imparting spiritual life by stewarding the Creator’s vision for His creation.

The Hebrew word “shalom” captures God’s vision well. “Shalom” (often translated “peace”) implies not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of wholeness and flourishing. Marriage is significant to God because He designed it to be a conduit for life to flow to His creation: physical life (as Adam and Eve bore children), and spiritual life (as Adam and Eve lived out God’s vision to bring flourishing to life, culture, and creation).

Marriage, therefore, is a “ministry team” that combines and mobilizes a couple’s God-designed physical capacities as well as their complimentary gifts and passions to bless the world. Through procreation, children are brought into the world; through godly parenting, the lives of children flourish; through rippling impact, the lives of others outside of the household are blessed. Marriage is a cup that God fills with blessing so that blessing can overflow to others.

In summary, marriage is a gift from God and an especially significant part of His vision for humanity because, through marriage: 1) *God provides companionship* 2) *God shapes people* 3) *God reveals beauty in diversity* and 4) *God provides a conduit for life to flow to His creation.*

Flowing from this vision, South Ridge holds to the following convictions concerning marriage:

1. As a “covenant” relationship, marriage is a vow to unconditionally love another for life. While there are extenuating circumstances where divorce may become necessary, God’s design for marriage is to love, honor, and cherish the other until death (To find out more about South Ridge’s convictions on divorce and remarriage, see South Ridge’s *Statement of Position Related to Divorce and Remarriage*).
2. While modern society often speaks of marriage vows as a constraint, the marriage vows of commitment are, instead, a gracious gift from God that create a context of grace and safety for husband and wife to grow, knowing that there is a mutual commitment to unconditionally love the other. Marriage is the only relationship where couples are “naked” and “feel no shame.” This is a powerful tool that the Holy Spirit uses to bring about deep transformation.
3. Marriage displays the unconditional nature of God’s love. When someone loves their spouse well, they see more clearly that God has created them and empowered them to love. When someone fails to love their spouse, but still continue to receives their spouse’s love, they see more clearly that they are worthy of love and relentlessly loved by their Creator.
4. South Ridge believes that cohabitation is not aligned with God’s vision for His creation. Living together before marriage creates a context of vulnerability for a man and a woman without the protection of the commitment (To find out more about the convictions of South Ridge on cohabitation, see South Ridge’s *Statement of Position Related to Cohabitation*).
5. Through God’s design for marriage (two distinctly shaped persons bound together in love as one), God gives people a concrete picture of the beauty and glory of His diversity as three-in-one. It is South Ridge’s conviction that God has designed marriage to be the union of one man and one woman to show us His nature as unity in diversity, a community of love overflowing to all creation. We see this unity in diversity as a man and a woman come together in marriage to create a beautiful, complimentary whole.
6. Marriage is God’s conduit to bring life to all creation: physical life (as Adam and Eve bore children) and spiritual life (as Adam and Eve lived out God’s vision to bring flourishing to life, culture, and creation). Same-sex marriages provide pleasure, but not procreation. Heterosexual marriage in principal has the potential to provide *both* pleasure *and* procreation. A significant part of God’s design for His creation is that marriages produce image-bearers who spread His goodness and grace throughout the earth.
7. Marriage is a “ministry team” in which husband and wife combine and mobilize their unique, complimentary gifts for God’s life-giving purposes in His world.