

The Purpose of Marriage

By John D. Laing

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the section **Background: The Image of God** in this lesson. Be prepared to explain that section to your group.

Assignment Two

Read Matthew 19:3–6 and Mark 10:2–9. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What does Jesus teach about the possibility of divorce and the nature of marriage in each encounter?

Assignment Three

Compile a list of reasons people get married by interviewing at least five people prior to the coming week's lesson. Try to get answers from a variety of people (different ages, genders, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, etc.). Create a list that reflects the general outlook in the community. Compare your answers to the summary in the **At Home: Nail It Down** section of the lesson.

Scripture to Memorize

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Genesis 2:18

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be able to explain God's purposes for marriage.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Stephanie always had a lot of guys who were interested in her. She was smart, funny, outgoing and attractive. She had a lot of guy friends, but she began to wonder about the kind of guy she should consider marrying. Even though marriage seemed a long way off from her sixteenth birthday, she heard an adult once say that you should not date someone you wouldn't consider marrying. How was she supposed to decide whom to marry? Can the purpose of marriage help her answer the question? How?

Background: The Image of God

In order to understand God's purpose for marriage, disciples need to remember God's purpose for creating mankind. In the creation story, the Bible declares that God made human beings in His own image. This means three things.

First, mankind is to rule over and care for God's creation. Read Genesis 1:26, 28; and 2:15. People are to act as God's official representatives.

Second, people are relational beings and are meant to be in a loving relationship with God and one another. Read Genesis 1:28 and 2:18.

Last, humans have a number of qualities somewhat similar to God (for example, aesthetic sense, rational thought, abstract thinking, emotional life, etc.). God's purpose was to create beings in His image. People depict God in the world, represent Him, and have an intimate relationship with Him. In other words, mankind exists to glorify God. As we shall see, the Bible teaches that marriage is a fundamental way to achieve those ends.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share a report.

Studying the Passage

Four passages speak directly to the reason people marry, and one more makes reference to those passages. The four (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7–8; Ephesians 5:31) all say (with minor variations), "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The three later passages refer back to the passage in Genesis. The passages from Matthew and Mark will be examined in a future study on the permanence of marriage, while the other two will be examined in this lesson.

Read Genesis 2:18–24 out loud.

Studying the Passage

This passage describes God's institution of marriage. It includes God's creation of Eve, His purposes for doing so, the presentation of Eve to Adam, and Adam's reaction.

Verse 18. not good. God's comment about it not being good for man to be alone stands in stark contrast to the constant refrain (throughout the story of creation) that God saw His creation as good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). **alone.** Adam was not literally alone because he

had a relationship with God and the animals were present. As the text makes clear, he was alone in the sense that there was no helper who was *like* him (vv. 18, 20). There was no companion with whom he could relate as an equal. **helper.** (also in v. 20). The Hebrew term often refers to one who aids in battle. It does not mean an inferior partner. In fact, most of the time it is used of God as our helper. Adam needed a helper to work with him in fulfilling his mission as God's image bearer and representative. **Fit.** Eve was a suitable helper because she was made in the image of God, she was a relational being like Adam, and she could complement his strengths and weaknesses in their God-given task.

Verse 19. what he would call them. Adam was given the power to name all the living creatures. This speaks to his authority in ruling over the other creatures and caring for creation as God's representative. It also speaks to the purpose of Eve's creation. No other creature could serve as a helper and companion to Adam in this task.

Verse 23. flesh of my flesh. Eve was created from Adam. The importance of this fact is found in the response of Adam: she was a perfect companion to him, made specifically for him and made of the same material. This speaks to purpose, equality and compatibility. Her purpose was to serve alongside Adam, as his helper, in accomplishing the plan of God in creating humans in His image. She was a perfect complement to him. In a rightly functioning marriage, she would provide strength for his weaknesses, just as he would hers.

Verse 24. Therefore. This verse sums up the section, tying the purpose of marriage to the purpose of creating mankind in the image of God.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share a report.

Read Ephesians 5:22–33 out loud.

On Your Own

Count the number of times Paul refers to Christ and the church, and write the number below.

Discussion Question

Discuss the different ways Paul refers to Christ's relationship to the church. Why do you think Paul talks about Christ and the church in this section on marriage?

Studying the Passage

Verse 23. wife . . . church. Paul compares wives to the church. Throughout the New Testament, the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. In the next two lessons we will study the meaning of **submit** more. The wife depicts the church.

Verse 23. husbands . . . Christ. Paul compares husbands to Christ in their relationship to their wives. We will consider the kind of loving leadership required of husbands in the coming lessons. In verse 30, Paul notes that important information about the church can be gleaned by considering marriage.

Verse 32. mystery. The Greek word refers to something that is hidden and cannot be known apart from God revealing it. The connection of husband and wife is more than physical; it is spiritual, and therefore mysterious. This is something only God can do and only something that

can fully be understood by reading God's Word. **Christ and the church.** Paul indicates he is talking about the relationship between Christ and the church.

The point in all this should be clear: Marriage illustrates the relationship of Christ to the church. Marriage is the most intimate union possible, apart from our relationship with God through the union of our spirits with God's Holy Spirit indwelling us. The love of husband and wife depicts Christ's love for, and relationship with, the church so that others (their children, family and neighbors) can see the gospel. Thus, the purpose of marriage in this context is to point others to Jesus Christ and the gospel.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share a report.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Disciples always are making preparations. Work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The passages that speak to why God instituted marriage also speak to the purpose for creating humans in His image. People are meant to rule over and care for the creation as God's representatives so that He is glorified in His divine plan. That is, people serve as depictions of God in the world.

Marriage serves this purpose by putting two people together who can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in ruling and caring. Together, they can demonstrate, illustrate and share the love of God for the creation and the love of Christ for His church (Genesis 2; Ephesians 5).

In 1 Corinthians 7:1–5, Paul suggests that persons should marry so they can satisfy their sexual longings. Disciples must remember that sex, experienced biblically, should be an expression of pure love within marriage. In that way it depicts the nature of God as love (1 John 4:8).

The sexual union allows married people to realize more of their purpose as made in the image of God. This is especially true of the relational aspect of that image.

In the physical union, husband and wife express the love they have for each other. At the same time, they express the spiritual union God has created between them. The husband and wife point to God and His plan, specifically to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will be studying more about the meaning of love in marriage and the spiritual union God creates between husband and wife in the coming lessons.

Follow up Question

What was God's purpose for creating humans? How does that speak to and clarify the purpose and function of Christian marriage?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.