

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLE #17

Gen. 1:26-28, 2:18-25 / Eph. 6:15-33 / 1 Cor. 7:34-35

HONORING GOD'S DESIGN OF MARRIAGE

Building our lives around the principles of God's Word is the purpose and goal of these studies. The principle of life that we now address, **God's design of marriage**, has a primary, even dominating, place in the life of every disciple of Christ.

This is true regardless of whether we are married or single, divorced or widowed. Building, **and rebuilding**, our life around God's design of marriage often presents us with our greatest opportunities to be a useful and powerful witness for Christ. Why is this true? Because God and His design for life is rejected and opposed by fallen man who lives for himself. Rejecting God's design of marriage is the way of the world. Immorality, adultery, unnatural affections and many other descriptions of our sinful conduct are really descriptions of our violation of God's design for marriage. But, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can build and rebuild our lives around His design – to His glory. Furthermore, making disciples requires that we teach and assist others in being examples of living according to this design of marriage.

1. God's Design Of Marriage

God's design of marriage is the first topic addressed in the Bible for the man God has just created.

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "**It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.**"...²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. ²² And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."

²⁴ **For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.** — Gen 2:18-24

Marriage is also among the last subjects found in the Bible, as the consummation of what Christ has promised His bride is described.

⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give

*the glory to Him, for **the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*** ⁸ *And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

⁹ *And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to **the marriage supper of the Lamb.**'"* And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

— Rev 19:6-9

God's design and institution of marriage dominates human life and is the object lesson or analogy used to explain God's relationship with Israel, and Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. It is essential that we understand it if we are to fully understand our God, human history, our redemption, and the things to come.

The Primary Characteristics Of God's Marriages To Israel And The Church:

1) PERMANENCE describes these relationships.

If, in a normal **contract** between two parties, the agreement is broken by one of the parties, this frees the other from his obligations in the contract. Not so with a **covenant** agreement. In this type of relationship, a covenant promise of one party is to be kept, even if the other party does not keep his. For example, when we sin, do we lose our salvation? Are the promises of eternal life voided? No, not if we are really saved. God has promised.

The word covenant is found 320 times in the Bible. The word contract not at all.

⁵ *He Himself has said, "**I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.**"*

— Heb.13:5

(See also, John 17:3, Heb. 13:8, Gen. 28:15, Dt. 13:6,8, Joshua 1:5, 1 Chr. 28:20)

¹² *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father...*

¹⁶ *and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, **that He may be with you forever;*** ¹⁷ *that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because **He abides with you, and will be in you.**"* — John 14:12-17

2) ONENESS describes these relationships.

¹¹ *"And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are..."* ²⁰ *I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word,* ²¹ ***that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us.**"*

— John 17:11-21

Our marriages as Christ's disciples are, by God's enabling grace, to reflect this "oneness".

²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body.

³¹ For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and **the two shall become one flesh.** ³² **This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.** — Eph 5:28-32

3) **FRUITFULNESS** describes these relationships.

¹⁸ For through Him (Christ) we...have our access in one Spirit to the Father.
¹⁹ So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom **the whole building, being fitted together, is growing** into a holy temple in the Lord. — Eph. 2:18-21

^{8:9} You are...in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you... ^{5:22} (and) **the fruit of the Spirit** (in and through us) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control... — Rom. 8:9; Gal 5:22-23

No man can have children on his own. His children are conceived, mature, and are born in and through his wife. As husbands and wives live as "one", they bear fruit together. The wife must agree to conceive and bear the children of the husband, just as we must yield to the leading, and power of the Holy Spirit Who is present and at work for us, in us, and through us. Apart from the Spirit's work in us and through us, God's fruit is not produced in our lives.

⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." — John 15:4-5

4) Self-Denying **LOVE** describes these relationships.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." — John 3:16

⁹ *By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.* ¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

¹¹ ***Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.***

— 1 John 4:9-11

2. Honoring God's Design In Marriage

The marriage vows spoken in Christian ceremonies have, for many centuries, been chosen to reflect God's covenantal design for our marriages. They have usually included words like the following: "Do you...covenant to...for better or worse...for as long as you both shall live?"

In American, until recently, attempts to terminate a marriage have been strongly opposed by our judiciary because of these Christians concepts. A divorce had to be granted by a judge and that was rarely sought and rarely granted until recently. Now it is granted for any cause.

Even the words of our marriage vows have changed, because 50% of those saying these original words over the last 40 years have not keep their word and are divorced. Today, the words are now often "for as long as love shall last". The desire and power to do God's will has waned. Marriage is God's idea. But our nation no longer cares. Neither do many in our churches.

¹³ *"And this is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because **He no longer regards your offering** or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and **the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.** ¹⁵ Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.*

¹⁶ *"For **I HATE DIVORCE,**" says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. **"So, take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."***

— Malachi 2:13-16

3. Honoring God's Design Before Marriage

Singleness is a calling and major part of God's plan for all of us for part of our life, and for some Christians it is a special calling for all of their life. In addition, singleness is a status that is encouraged above marriage for some because it frees a person from the responsibilities of marriage and family to give more of one's life to others.

³² *But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;* ³³ *but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,* ³⁴ *and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.* ³⁵ *And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and **to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.*** — 1 Cor. 7:32-35

⁷ *Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.* — 1 Cor. 7:7

⁴ *No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.* — 2 Tim. 2:4

Purity and virginity before marriage is sought by the Lord for His people. Wise standards, principles of dating, accountability to others, and personal convictions, are essential if improper and immoral relationships before marriage are to be avoided and we are to be kept from guilt, have joy, and be most useful and fruitful. What convictions do you have, and what commitments have you made if you are single?

4. Honoring God's Design As A Rebuilder Of Broken Marriages

God is a rebuilder of ruined relationships. The Bible says that He has been divorced. He knows what you are facing and feeling if you are faced with the consequences of a failed marriage like He is. His responses to betrayal, rejection, and opposition are quite amazing.

The life that God asks us to live for Him is not hard – it is impossible in our own strength. Here are some points to consider regarding rebuilding broken relationships.

1. God would have you to be free of guilt. *(see Study #9)*
2. God would have you conquer bitterness. *(see Study #7)*
3. God wants you to understand why He allows suffering. *(see Study #6)*
4. God want you to help others rebuild their lives and marriages. *(see Study #8)*
5. God wants you to rebuild your marriage as far as possible. *(see Mk. 8:34)*
6. God wants you to demonstrate Christ-like attitude and actions to your children.

UNIT 17 STUDY SESSION #1

In preparation for the group study read the above summary regarding God's design of marriage and then complete the following self-evaluation.

Evaluating My Life In Light Of God's Design Of Marriage

1. Contentment describes me well in my present situation regarding marriage.
Yes _____ No _____
2. In my marriage situation, I would say that I am doing well _____ I am a good example _____
I am doing ok _____ I could be doing better _____ I do not think I am a good example _____
3. I understand the difference between a contract and a covenant commitment.
Yes _____ No _____
4. I am committed to God's design of a covenant relationship for marriage.
Yes, because _____
No, because _____
With these limitations and exceptions _____

Discussion Questions for Unit 17 Study Session #1

1. Four characteristics of God's relationship with the nation of Israel and the Church are emphasized in the study material as those that should characterize our own marriage relationships: Permanence, Oneness, Fruitfulness, and Love. Is this biblically sound? How does this relate to premarital sex, divorce, remarriage, and abortion?
2. Would you attend a wedding of a Christian who has been married before and divorced? If so, are there any reasons you would not attend such a marriage?
3. What guidelines or counsel would you give to a young unmarried woman regarding invitations to pursue a "casual", dating relationship with a man? A young man regarding pursuing the same with a young woman?
4. The consequences to the children of those who reject God's design for marriage are often significant. What does the Word of God say about this? (*see Num. 14:18, Ps. 106:44-46*) How might these be addressed as we seek to help those who are facing these?

Prayer Together

UNIT 17 STUDY SESSION #2

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

In preparation for Session 2 consider pursuing one of the following projects depending on your marital status and be prepared to share about it.

1. Read and study the book of Hosea. Summarize the issues regarding God's design for marriage that are addressed or illustrated there and what applications are appropriate for our own lives.
2. Husband Project
Husbands are exhorted to live with their wives in an understanding way. Write a summary of 1) what you have learned in this regard, and 2) what counsel you would give to young husbands.
3. Wife Project
Write a summary of the counsel you would give to a young wife based on the lessons you have learned living with a man.
4. Still Single Project
Write a one or two page summary of the counsel you would give to an unmarried Christian girl or boy in their late teens or early 20s regarding their goals, approach, cautions, and commitments, regarding 1) dating, 2) engagement, and 3) marriage.
5. Rebuilder's Project
Write out a summary of 1) what you have faced and learned through your experience, 2) what you would have done differently, and 3) how your trials and tests have affected your relationship with Christ.
6. Widower's Project
If you have lost your spouse, think through what the Lord has taught you in retrospect about marriage and be prepared to share the most important things a Christian should focus on in marriage.

Discussion Questions for Unit 17 Study Session #2

If you have been able to do one of the projects, can you share it with us?

Prayer Together