

The Purpose of Marriage

Genesis 1:18-25

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Four years ago, Elizabeth Gilbert wrote a best selling book called “Eat, Pray, Love” that tells the story of her horrible divorce which she described as having a really bad car accident every single day for about two years. She turned against marriage, calling it a “repressive institution that is suffocating, old-fashioned and irrelevant.” Recently Ms. Gilbert has published another book titled *Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage*. She now says that her rebellion against marriage was wrong-headed from the start and she writes, “Marriage is not an act of private prayer, it is both a public and private concern with real world consequences.”

We are a society in rebellion and denial of the truth and purpose of marriage. We are paying a heavy price for this. God is judging us, and the results are not good: high poverty rates for women and children, high rates of alcoholism, stressed out schools and teachers, crime, illiteracy, depression and the failure of our children to thrive. It is making rubble of our lives, our culture, and our future. We have men who do not know how to be a decent husband and father because they have never seen one. We have women who know how to give birth but do not have any idea what it takes to be a decent mother or wife. I believe these issues are at the heart of so much pain in Roscommon County, and I believe that God has a word for us that will heal and renew and restore us. I believe that as Christian people we can and should lift up this healing word from God and share it by example and invitation. But before we can do this we have got to get our own lives in order.

Marriage is for the glory of God. Genesis 2:18-25 is not so much a story about the creation of the first man and the first woman as it is a story about the creation of marriage. Verse 24 is the climactic conclusion: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

Before there were cities or states or nations, there was marriage. It was designed and created by God. This is to say that marriage is not based in law. It is not a legal institution that we can redefine and experiment with. Marriage is based in nature and the ruler of all

nature: our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we see a public fury to protect our natural resources from pollution and exploitation. We should have the same furious passion to protect and promote marriage because it is a part of nature, not law. That is why the marriage vows begin this way: *In the name of God...* It begins with God, not me, not the law, not the state but God. Marriage is for the glory of God.

As a practical matter this means that couples must love God first above their spouse. Jesus Christ must be the head of the household. It is not about me getting my needs met. It is about me glorifying God in my marriage. That is why Christian marriage vows do not say anything about me getting my needs met. It is for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse that I promise to be faithful. To be serious about this one must put God first and aim to glorify God in all things.

A second great truth is this: Marriage is good for us. Genesis 2:18 reads, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” This is not true because man says so out of his own experience. This is true because God says so. God created us and God created marriage because it is good for us.

The social science data on this is overwhelming. Marriage is the best thing for public health. Married people live significantly longer. They experience fewer health problems, they recover faster from sickness, they have fewer financial problems, and they report higher rates of satisfaction with life and lower rates of addiction, depression, crime and risky behaviors.

Married parents have significantly reduced rates of infant mortality, their children have fewer health problems, do better in school and more of them go on to college and have higher levels of income.

Married couples have significantly higher incomes than singles or even cohabiting couples. The data also shows that couples who chose to live together without marriage do not share in any of these statistical benefits. They are not statistically different from single people. The science clearly vindicates the word of God: living together is bad for you and the community, marriage is good for you and for society. To check the facts on this visit the Institute for American Values web site and review their report on Marriage and Public Health. We should promote marriage. Every sex education program in the church and school should promote marriage and detail the practices that contribute to a

successful marriage. The single worst thing anyone can do to prepare for marriage is to co-habit with someone else. Do not do this, for you can not glorify God with such a relationship. You will most likely pierce yourself with many sorrows before you are through and not only that you will bring trouble upon all the people around you.

Marriage is a mutual partnership based on a life-long commitment of self-giving love. The Bible says the two become one. (Genesis 2:24) This presumes a union of equals. The woman was made out of a rib by the divine surgeon to show us her proper place in marriage: side by side with her husband in mutual partnership. The man too, recognizes this for when he sees his bride he exclaims that she is “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh”—equal in dignity and value with himself. (Genesis 2:23) That is why the vows of Christian marriage are exactly the same for both husband and wife.

Some people think this partnership looks like the letter “A”: Two people leaning against each other. But this is not a partnership; it is overdependence. Neither partner can stand on their own two feet. Neither one really brings any strength to the relationship. They depend on each other but it is not a partnership. It is not what God intended.

Some people think marriage looks like the letter “H”: Two people standing straight on their own and holding hands. But these people live together without a partnership. They lack trust and dependence. If one side left, the other would go on as if nothing had happened.

The partnership of marriage is best represented by a “W”. Here each partner has definite strengths of their own, yet they are bound together in mutual trust and reliance. They are more than just the sum of their parts. Their relationship has strength and life of its own that transforms the individuals who are in it. This is God’s plan for marriage.

The concluding marks of God’s plan for marriage are unity, which is the spiritual meaning of “one flesh.” Ephesians 2:22 says it this way: “And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Intimacy is the spiritual meaning of “nakedness” – being able to bare your soul. Ephesians 4:15 reads, “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

Acceptance is the spiritual meaning of the phrase “being unashamed.” It is not rejection or tolerance, but as the Bible says in Colossians 3:13, “Bear with each other and

forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

The purpose of marriage is to glorify God, to bring God’s goodness upon the earth and to create lasting and faithful partnerships between men and women who love each other.