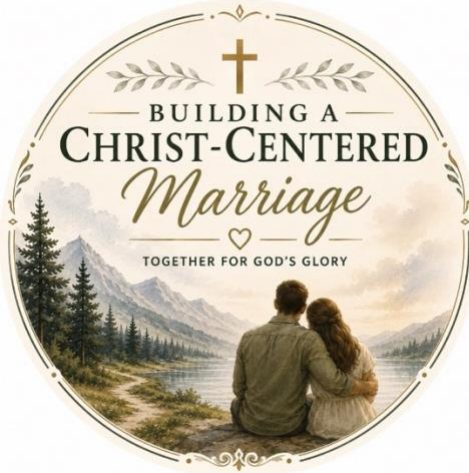




GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

LESSON ONE

Part C

BUILDING A CHRIST CENTERED MARRIAGE

Ten Biblical Lessons for Growing Together in Love, Faith, and Unity

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| 1. God's Design for Marriage (A, B, C) | 6. God's Gift of Physical Intimacy |
| 2. Love, Respect, Biblical Leadership | 7. Making Decisions Together |
| 3. Communication That Builds Unity | 8. Money, Work, and Stewardship |
| 4. Healing from Past Hurts, Bitterness,
and Unforgiveness | 9. Protecting Your Marriage |
| 5. Growing Spiritually Together | 10. Growing Old Together and Leaving a
Godly Legacy |

LESSON OVERVIEW

Many people view marriage as an agreement that lasts only as long as both people are happy.

God describes marriage differently. In Scripture, marriage is called a covenant.

A contract is often based on what each person receives. When one person fails to meet the terms, the other person may feel free to walk away.

A covenant is based on a faithful promise. When a man and woman marry, they promise themselves to one another before God.

This does not mean that marriage will always be easy or that serious sin should be ignored. It means that marriage is entered with a serious commitment to love, faithfulness, truth, and perseverance.

IN THIS LESSON, WE WILL STUDY THE FOLLOWING TRUTHS:

PART 1: Marriage was created by God.

PART 2: A husband and wife become one.

PART 3: Marriage is a lifelong covenant before God.

KEY VERSE: (Genesis 2:24) *Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

MAIN SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Genesis 2:18–24

18 And the LORD God said that **it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.**

19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but **for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.**

21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and **brought her unto the man.**

23 And Adam said that 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 Therefore shall a man **LEAVE** his father and his mother and shall **CLEAVE** unto his wife: and they shall be **ONE** flesh.

PART 3: MARRIAGE IS A LIFELONG COVENANT BEFORE GOD

1. Marriage is more than a human agreement. It is a sacred covenant made before God.
2. Many people believe marriage should last only as long as both people are happy.
3. God describes marriage differently. In the Bible, marriage is called a covenant.
4. A contract often focuses on what each person will receive. If one person fails, the other may feel free to leave.
5. A covenant is a faithful promise. A husband and wife promise themselves to each other before God.

GOD IS A WITNESS TO THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Malachi 2:14–16

Yet ye say, wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is **she thy companion**, and the **wife of thy covenant**. ¹⁵ And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that **he hateth putting away (divorce)**: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore, take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously (guard your life so you do not become unfaithful).

- Marriage vows are not made only before family members, friends, church leaders, or government officials. God hears those promises. He is a witness to the covenant.

Practical Illustration: God Was in the Room

Samuel and Martha made their marriage promises before their families and church. Many years later, they went through a hard season. Money was tight, work was heavy, and they often spoke sharply to each other at home.

Around other people, they acted as though everything was fine. They could hide their struggles from family and friends, but they could not hide them from God. He heard their unkind words and knew the hurt in their hearts.

One evening, they remembered that God had heard their marriage promises. Samuel admitted that he had been harsh and impatient. Martha admitted that she had allowed anger to grow in her heart. They asked God and each other for forgiveness.

They also found hope in knowing that God saw their burdens. He saw Samuel working hard to care for the family. He saw Martha's quiet tears and faithful service. He understood what others could not see.

Samuel and Martha began praying together and asked a trusted Christian couple for help. Remembering that God was a witness helped them take their promises seriously. It also reminded them that they did not have to repair their marriage without His help.

COVENANT LOVE REMAINS FAITHFUL

Matthew 19:6

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. **What therefore God hath joined together**, let not man put asunder.

- Feelings are real, but they are not always reliable. Feelings may change because of stress, tiredness, conflict, sickness, disappointment, or temptation. Covenant love is deeper than a feeling. It makes a choice to remain faithful.

Practical Illustration: Love Is More Than a Feeling

Jacob came home after a long and tiring day. His wife, Sarah, had also spent the day working hard and caring for the children. Both were tired and easily upset.

Jacob forgot to bring home something Sarah needed. Sarah felt that he did not care about her. She spoke sharply to him. Jacob felt attacked, so he became angry and walked away.

Later, they sat down and talked. Sarah honestly explained why she felt hurt. Jacob listened and admitted that he should have remembered. Sarah also admitted that her words had been unkind.

Their feelings were real, but they chose not to let those feelings control their actions. Jacob showed love by listening and asking for forgiveness. Sarah showed love by speaking truth without attacking him and forgiving his mistake.

Covenant love did not mean they ignored the problem. It meant they faced the problem with truth, patience, humility, and forgiveness. They chose to protect their marriage instead of keeping a list of each other's failures.

COVENANT DOES NOT EXCUSE SIN

Colossians 3:12–14

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ **Forbearing** one another, and **forgiving** one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.** ¹⁴ And **above all these things put on charity (love)**, which is the bond of perfectness.

- The seriousness of marriage should never be used to trap someone in danger or force them to remain silent about abuse. Physical violence, sexual abuse, threats, severe control, addiction, and repeated unfaithfulness are serious matters.

Practical Illustration: Seeking Safety Is Not Giving Up

Mary's husband often threatened her and controlled where she went. One evening, he became violent. Later, he said he was sorry, but he refused to seek help or accept correction. The same behavior continued.

Mary was afraid to tell anyone. Someone had told her that a faithful wife should submit, forgive, and remain silent. But those words were being used to hide serious sin.

Mary finally spoke with a trusted and godly person. She and her children were taken to a safe place. Proper leaders and trained helpers were told what had happened. Mary's choice to seek safety did not mean that she hated her husband or had stopped caring about her marriage.

Her husband's words were not enough to prove repentance. True repentance would require confession, lasting change, accountability, and a willingness to receive correction.

A marriage covenant is serious, but it does not excuse violence, threats, abuse, or cruelty. God's plan for marriage includes love, truth, faithfulness, and protection. Seeking safety and proper help is not the same as giving up on marriage.

CHRIST MUST BE AT THE CENTER

John 15:4–5

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do nothing**.

- A husband cannot meet every need of his wife. A wife cannot meet every need of her husband. Only Christ can fully satisfy the heart.

Practical Illustration: The Center of the Wheel

Think about a wooden wagon wheel. The hub is at the center, and every spoke is joined to it. If the hub becomes weak or breaks, the whole wheel is in danger.

Marriage is much the same. Christ must be the center. A husband and wife cannot hold their marriage together by their own strength. They also cannot expect each other to provide all their happiness, peace, security, and worth.

As a husband grows closer to Christ, the Lord teaches him to love, listen, serve, and confess his sin. As a wife grows closer to Christ, the Lord teaches her to love, forgive, speak truth, and remain faithful. As both move closer to Christ, they also grow closer to each other.

Simply going to church does not place Christ at the center. Christ must guide how they speak at home, spend money, solve problems, use their time, and treat each other in private.

Like the hub of a wheel, Christ gives strength and direction to every part of the marriage. Without Him at the center, the marriage carries a burden that it was never meant to carry.

A THREEFOLD CORD

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. ¹⁰ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? ¹² And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- Ecclesiastes teaches that a threefold cord is not quickly broken. This verse is often used to picture a husband, a wife, and God joined together. While the passage speaks more broadly about the strength of companionship, the principle applies well to marriage.

Practical Illustration: The Strength of Three Strands

David and Anna prayed at meals and attended church each week, but they had never prayed alone together. When a serious problem came into their family, both felt worried and helpless.

One evening, David said, “I do not know what to do, but I believe we should pray together.” He thanked God for Anna and asked the Lord for wisdom. His prayer was short and simple. Anna then prayed about the burden on her heart.

Their problem did not disappear that night, but something changed between them. They knew they were not facing it alone. They were bringing their burden to God together.

David and Anna began praying together each evening. Sometimes they prayed for only a few minutes. They thanked God, confessed their sins, and asked for help with one need.

Like three strands woven into one cord, David, Anna, and their faith in God became stronger together. Trouble still came, but they learned to meet it with prayer, Scripture, and trust in the Lord.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Every marriage needs the grace of God. It is easy to focus on how your husband or wife needs to change. It is harder to ask God to show you what needs to change in your own heart.

Ask yourself whether you have been proud, harsh, dishonest, controlling, bitter, selfish, or unwilling to forgive. Do not wait for your spouse to change before you obey God. You are responsible for your own words, attitudes, and choices.

Place Christ at the center of your marriage by praying together, reading Scripture, confessing sin, seeking forgiveness, and asking for help when problems become too difficult to handle alone.

DISCUSSION AND SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you view your marriage mainly as an agreement between two people or as a covenant made before God?
2. What attitude, habit, or sin in your own life is weakening your marriage?
3. When difficulties arise, do you move toward your husband or wife, or do you withdraw and create distance?
4. What would it look like for you and your spouse to place Christ more fully at the center of your marriage?

COUPLE'S ASSIGNMENT

Set aside at least thirty minutes this week when you will not be interrupted. Put away your phones and choose a quiet place. Read **Genesis 2:18–25** together.

Then discuss these questions:

1. What first attracted you to each other?
2. In what ways have you been good companions to one another?
3. Where have you allowed distance to grow between you?
4. What is one thing each of you can do to strengthen the marriage?

Listen without interrupting or defending yourself.

Do not use the time to bring up every past failure. The purpose is to understand one another and take one step toward greater unity.

End your time by praying together.

Each person should thank God for at least one quality in the other. Then ask God to help you follow His design for marriage.