

# OpenTheo

## What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married (Part 1)



### What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg, who has been married for 20 years, provides insights on what individuals should understand before tying the knot. He emphasizes the gravity of marriage as a binding covenant between two individuals who make a promise to hold on to it. Gregg stresses the importance of understanding God's definition of marriage, clarifying that love should be the primary feature of a relationship, and indicates that divorce should never be an option in fulfilling this covenant. Finally, he emphasizes that marriage must be done for the right reasons and hopes that individuals, whether single or unhappily married, can find satisfaction and happiness in their current situation.

### Transcript

This is the first time in many years, I don't know how many, that I've been actually going to teach about marriage. I used to teach about marriage and family all the time when I had a really successful marriage and family. In the 80s and the 90s, I had a model marriage and family, and it was one of the main things I taught about.

Wonderful Christian children, wonderful supportive wife, I felt, and it seemed like it was a no-brainer to tell people how it's done. What happened is that marriage broke up, and it wasn't the first. I just need to be totally transparent with you here.

I have lost three marriages. One died. One wife died.

That was a successful marriage until that point. I had two unsuccessful marriages. I married when I was 19, not very wisely.

Before I was 21, my wife had run off with somebody else and left me with a baby at home. I was a single dad at age 21. Then I was single for six years, married again, and my second wife was killed in Santa Cruz, California, six months after we were married.

It was a good marriage, though six months is not a very long test, but at least it was a very positive experience until that final event. That was in 1980, though, a long time ago. I married again, a girl who had been a missionary in YWAM.

I knew her parents. They were great Christian people. She had been a Christian for five years since college.

We got married, and we were married for 20 years. We had four children, beautiful children. She was a support in the ministry, but then she had some issues in her head.

I don't know what they are. They've never been diagnosed, but she just left the family, left the kids, had a complete change of personality. She had been a homeschooling mom, very conservative, very committed to the children, never left them with babysitters, wanted to be with them all the time.

Then when they were three of them in their teens and one was ten, she just turned on her heels, left the kids, left me, left the Lord. Hasn't spoken to me really since. That was 16 years ago.

I was single, raising my other kids for 10 years, and then about six years ago, seven years ago, I met my wife, Dana. We've been married going on six years now, and it's as good a marriage as I could hope for, as I could dream of, actually. We haven't had our first argument yet.

My previous marriages, we didn't get through the first week without our first argument. She thinks we've argued. I don't remember it, but I honestly don't.

It's been a totally wonderful, peaceful marriage, and she's very well suited for me. But I do have a history of marriage failure. I mean, two divorces.

Now, in both cases, I fought valiantly to save the marriages. I had no interest in the divorce. There were no grounds for the divorce.

I honestly don't even know why the divorces took place. It's just both cases are very mysterious. But I tend to blame it on the devil, but I don't want to blame the devil for things that are my fault.

But in looking at it in retrospect, I can't claim that I was a perfect husband, but there was no one who wanted to be one, probably, more than I. There's no one more dedicated to family, children, making a marriage happy and work, and thinking I had that. I actually really believed I had a perfect marriage until, like, the last year or so. My ex-wife began to drift off and be silent and couldn't get any information out of her, and then eventually she just walked out.

Never figured out what that was about. But it, of course, took the wind out of my sails, pretty much. I had taught about marriage and family a great deal.

I thought, well, someone's got two divorces. How in the world could they ever speak credibly on the subject? And you might be wondering that yourself. I'm wondering that

myself.

Why should you listen to somebody who's got that kind of a history? And the only answer I can give is that because what I teach is biblical, and I still believe the Bible, I still believe that we should follow the Bible. I don't believe that we can always guarantee that our partners will. But whether they will or not, we must, because marriage is under tremendous attack in our society.

First of all, the whole definition of marriage has been lost. And not just with the whole same-sex marriage controversy that's arisen in modern times in the last several years. Back in the 60s, when, you know, no-fault divorce was introduced, that was the first sacrifice of the definition of marriage.

Because marriage, by definition in the Bible, is lifelong. It's permanent. And you don't walk away from it.

There may be grounds for divorce in some extreme cases, and I believe there are very few. But at the same time, even if there are grounds for divorce, I believe it always pleases God more. I shouldn't say always, but I think almost always pleases God more for people to keep working on the marriage.

In my first marriage, my wife was having affairs before she left, and I was determined to stay. I believed that my wife's affairs gave me grounds for divorce. But I also believed that I had made some vows to stay with her for better or for worse, and this was worse than I thought.

But it was still my determination that this marriage would work if God would allow it, and if I could do anything about it. So I do believe that what I'm teaching is the counsel of Scripture, is what the Bible says, and I believe the Scripture. I also believe that while I'm an imperfect man, and have therefore always been an imperfect husband too, I do believe that I have followed the teaching of Scripture to the best of my knowledge, certainly most of the time.

And therefore, I'm not teaching something I don't practice. I can teach what a husband ought to do, and I can say, this is what I have endeavored to do. I can't guarantee your marriage will succeed.

I can teach what a wife ought to do. I can't guarantee that a wife will do it, or that a wife who does do it will have a husband who does what he should do. The thing about marriage is it takes two people to be utterly committed to it for it to work.

I've often heard people say, there's no innocent party in a divorce, and I just don't think that's true. God was in a divorce with Israel, and he was innocent, certainly. Hosea was in a divorce.

The Bible seems to indicate he was innocent. Jesus hasn't been in a divorce, but he certainly has had a failed marriage with the bride of Christ going the direction they have, and no one can blame Jesus for that. Sometimes people say if a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church, the wife will flourish and thrive, and the marriage will be great.

I think Jesus loves the church like Christ loves the church, and his marriage hasn't been as good as I'm sure he would have liked it to be. And that's our fault, not his. And our fault is often seen in the way that we do not seek to honor him and glorify him, in the most important of all relationships that God has put us in, and that is with a spouse.

I say it's the most important because it's the only relationship I know of, other than our relationship with God, that is a covenant. And a covenant is an important thing. It's like a contract, only far more sacred.

You know, in an ordinary contract, a business contract, you can mutually agree to change the contract or let each other out of the contract or whatever. I mean, it's not a sacred thing. If you're buying a car from me and you'll make payments on a certain schedule, and we've got a contract about that, and then you come to me and say, I'm sorry, I lost my job, I can't make the payments on that schedule, could we modify it? I say, sure, we can change that.

I might even say, just keep the car and forget the payments, that's okay. And that's because we can do that with a business contract. But with a covenant that's made before God and made by God, with us, that's got a different dimension to it.

And there's no other human relationships that we're authorized to be in that are covenant relationships. I know some churches talk about having covenant relationships with their members. They even talk about people who visit more than one church as if they're almost being adulterous by church hopping, as they would say.

I don't think that God ever has authorized us being in covenant relationships with an organized body of Christians or with any other Christians other than our spouses. Now, David and Jonathan had a covenant between them, and they weren't married, obviously. And, you know, it's not wrong.

It's just a binding thing that is unnecessary, except in one case where it's absolutely necessary, and that's marriage. It is practically, it may even be, the very definition of marriage itself. But it has certain features that have to go with that definition, too.

The reason I say we sacrificed marriage back in the 60s with the introduction of no-fault divorce is because we ended marriage as a binding contract in the 60s. You no longer have to prove that your spouse has committed infidelity or has even done anything wrong at all. There ain't no good guy.

There ain't no bad guy. There's only you and me, and we just don't agree. And that's the modern attitude toward the thing.

We live together as long as we both shall love is how some people are now making their vows. It's actually not that flexible. There is grace for marriage failure, and there are, I think, some extreme cases where there's grounds even for a marriage to break up.

But I don't think it's ever desirable for a marriage to break up. I think that even marriages that break up on proper grounds are disastrous for both parties, for children, for in-laws, for friends, for the church. In all ways, marriage breakup is just not good, and it's not right.

There never has been a marriage that has broken up, apart from by death, that didn't involve heinous sin. Either it broke up because one party committed a heinous sin, giving the other grounds for divorce, or the party got a divorce without those grounds, which itself is a heinous sin, a breach of contract, of covenant. So we're not talking about just one of the issues in the Christian life.

This is one of the main issues in the Christian life, especially since Christianity is not really consisting of religious practices or even so much religious opinions. Some people will excommunicate you if you have the wrong religious opinion or the wrong religious ritual. But Christianity is not about ritual, and it's not about opinion, really.

It's really about relationship, relationship with God, which is a very personal thing and a group thing, a corporate thing. The church has a relationship with God and each of us individually, and then also the relationships between each other. And Jesus said on those two things hang all the law and the prophets.

Everything God expects of us is hanging on how we conduct ourselves in those relationships. And while we may feel more affection sometimes for our children than we do for our spouses, our relationship with our spouse is actually more binding. God lends us children.

We're supposed to train them and launch them, and then they go off and they leave their father and mother and cleave to their spouse, and they become one flesh in another solidarity, not ours. They're still our children, of course, because of historical background and affection, but the marriage is for life. Marriage is you don't have a covenant with your children like you have with your spouse.

And keeping covenant is absolutely what every human being should do simply because that's what integrity requires. And when you give up your integrity, you've given up everything that's worthwhile. I don't believe that you can walk out on your marriage without walking out on God, because when people get married, at least in Christian marriages, they actually make oaths in the name of God, in the name of the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Spirit, I vow that I will do such and such.

You brought God into this. You brought his reputation, his integrity into this, and it would be there anyway even if you hadn't, because Jesus said, if you don't use a vow, your yes should be yes and your no should be no. But the point is people take their integrity much too lightly, and they don't take marriage seriously.

Part of this is because too many Christians, I'm afraid, aren't taking God seriously. This I've never understood. I mean, if there's a God, take him seriously.

If there's not, forget it. To me, it seems like God is the one thing that you can't take lightly. If there is a God who made you and is concerned about everything, is going to judge everything you do, all the hairs of your head are numbered, and every word you speak you'll give account, can anything be more important than that? And if there's no such God, then all talk of God is just silly fantasy and nonsense.

It's not important at all. It's either everything or nothing as far as I can see. All this middle ground.

I kind of like God. I kind of like singing the songs. I like being in the church.

I'd like to think that on my deathbed I could have some kind of claim that I had a connection with God, but he's not going to interfere with anything I want to do with my life. To me, when people call themselves Christians, they look at marriage, they have to look at marriage the way God does. They will not be redefining it.

And by the way, I just want to say this about the recent, of course, adoption of the same-sex marriage model in our culture. Obviously, people who are favorable toward that, their main argument is, you know, people who are homosexuals really have the same rights as everyone else. Why should we deny them of their rights? My answer has always been, I don't want to deny them of any rights.

They have all the same rights I have, but I don't have the right to redefine marriage. Neither does anyone else. God defined marriage.

I didn't, and I can't redefine it. Neither can they. Marriage is something.

It has a certain definition. God defined it. Jesus affirmed it.

When he was asked about divorce, of course, in Matthew 19, he said, Well, have you not read that he who made them in the beginning made them male and female and said, For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one put asunder. So Jesus forbade divorce and, of course, anything other than heterosexual union as marriage.

He defined it. And so our society has abandoned both parts of that definition. First, the no divorce was abandoned in the 60s, and then, of course, in recent years, the heterosexual part of the definition.

But Christians are people who must stand with God and say, Well, okay, society can call their marriages whatever they want to, and they will. We can't make them obey God or make them agree with God, but we have to agree with God. Paul said about those who are not Christians, What do I have to do with judging those who are outside? God judges those.

We judge those who are inside. We have to make sure the church is affirming what God affirmed. If the world outside doesn't, we might feel more threatened than we did 50 years ago when the world outside affirmed many of the things Christians believed, even though they weren't Christians.

Now the world isn't affirming that, but we still have no option but to stand with what God says. And our marriages are to be one of the most distinctive ways in which our discipleship, our obedience, and loyalty to Christ are exhibited. Because, as you know, a very large percentage of marriages end without death in our society today.

And it is assumed that if your spouse is simply not meeting your needs, which is one of the phrases most popular today, or emotionally abusing you. I've never known quite how to define that. Nobody should abuse anyone else emotionally or otherwise, but I'm still not sure what people are calling emotional abuse.

If a man insults his wife, if a wife isn't sexually responsive to him, is that emotional abuse? Maybe it is. I'm not sure anyone has a very clear definition of what that is. But the thing is, almost anything can be called that if you're sick of being married and looking for a way out.

And you'll almost always find sympathetic friends in the church who'll say, Oh, you poor thing, you shouldn't have to live with that kind of unhappiness. Well, who says you shouldn't have to live with that kind of unhappiness? Didn't you take vows? Didn't you anticipate this? Didn't you say for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health? If you said that, didn't you mean it? Who were you lying to? And if you did mean it, then you are called on to stand by it and have integrity and maintain what you promised to God and to man and to your spouse. Now, therefore, we need to make sure that we're not drifting in our own thinking about marriage.

No Christian should be thinking about divorce because of what Christians believe about marriage. Now, the society is not going to be sympathetic towards you. Your neighbors, your friends, even some of the people in the church, they're going to be getting divorced.

And you're supposed to just grin and bear it and say, Well, you know, what do you expect? They weren't happy. You've got to find someone to love, don't you? Well, that's not the basis of marriage. Love is not the basis of any relationship.

Love is what you want to have as a primary feature in every relationship because a relationship that isn't loving isn't very pleasant to anyone. So obviously loving each other, laying down your life for each other is part of your assignment. But relationships are not based on love because if you don't feel like you love someone, you can still be in a relationship with them.

You can still have a marriage with them. If you're faithful, marriage is based on faith and faithfulness. You make promises.

That's what differs between a married couple and a couple that are living together and not married. One couple has made promises that the others didn't make. That's what marriage is.

Marriage is a covenant you enter by making promises and keeping them. And so what if you make a promise that you'll stay with someone until you die, even if you're unhappy, and then you get unhappy? What then? Well, it should be a no-brainer for anyone who has any integrity. Well, I made a promise, didn't I? I'm going to keep my promise.

And more than that, I'm going to try to make a happier situation. I'm going to try to be happy. I'm going to try to make my spouse more happy.

That's what a Christian wants to do. But the Christian doesn't feel that marriage is something you can get out of when it gets intolerable. Because I don't know that anything, any torture, can really be truly called intolerable to the Christian.

I understand there are things that we can't tolerate in our flesh. But I hear of Christians who are tortured every day in China and North Korea, places like that. Things that we can't even imagine surviving or anticipating the torturers coming in again to do these horrible things to them.

And reading Fox's Book of Martyrs, which I did when I was young, really kind of conditioned me for thinking about what life is like outside the charmed existence of the United States in the last generation. Christians have had to suffer horrendous things. And were they intolerable things? It seems like it to me, but they tolerate it by the grace of God.

God's grace is available to Christians. That's what makes Christianity very different than any other kind of life. You live it by the grace of God.

God gives grace in hardship. When Paul was tormented by some thorn in his flesh, we don't know what it was, but it certainly tormented him. Three times he begged Christ to



remove it from him.

And Christ said, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness. I have found, I've been through some trials.

I've lost two marriages to divorce. I lost one with a wife who was killed. I've had some trials with my children in recent years.

And these are hard trials, but I'm not going to whine about it. They're not anywhere near as hard as Christians in many parts of the country are enduring, or many parts of the world, certainly. And I have found, in all of them, that there really is reality in what the Bible calls the grace of God, given in times of trial.

When we determine to trust God and to be faithful, we find that God makes good on his promises, and he gives grace. And allows us not only to survive hard situations, but to survive them in a way that glorifies him. To do so gracefully, full of the grace that he gives.

And this is normal Christianity. It's not normal churchianity, because in the church, most people are not even thinking in terms of transformation of their lives. They're not thinking in terms of living entirely by trust in God.

This is something that early Christians, I mean, that was what was preached to them from the beginning of their conversion, and should be. But our Christians today often don't even know what Christianity calls them to. And as soon as things get a little tough, I've heard these people say, I don't think God would want me to stay in a marriage that's this unpleasant.

Well, maybe you ought to get to know who God is then. God wants you to be faithful. God wants you to be honest.

And when you make promises to God, he wants you to keep them, as well as the promises you made to your spouse and to everyone else. So, it's so urgent for us to recover, or at least retain, the godly, biblical understanding of what marriage is, because we no longer live in a society that will agree with it. When I was growing up, I lived in a secular world, but I was raised in the church, as a Christian, in a Christian family.

But the secular world outside still thought the same way about marriage, mostly, as my family did. Sure, there were people getting divorces, but they still looked down on it, still kind of frowned on it. Divorce was a little embarrassing.

That's not the case anymore. We don't live in a world that's going to affirm anything we believe about marriage, and that has become very obvious in the last few years. So, what do we do? Do we condemn the world? No, you can't expect non-Christians to be Christian.

We expected them to because they lived in a Christianized, secular society for so long. It just seemed like non-Christians were supposed to be like Christians. Paul never thought that about the pagans in Rome or in Ephesus, that they're supposed to be living like Christians.

They're supposed to become Christians, and then they have to live like Christians. In the meantime, we don't expect that. We don't judge those who are outside, but we do judge those who are inside, and we judge, first of all, ourselves.

Say, am I holding firm to the foundation that God has given in my marriage, or am I thinking of marriage? Some of you here are not married, but would like to be, perhaps, someday. That's why I named this series, What You Absolutely Need to Know Before and After You Get Married, because I think that people who need to know this before they get married, if possible, some of you didn't know it before you got married, and you find yourself married. Well, you need to know it now.

It would have been very great for you to know it before you got married, but you can't turn the clock back in that respect. It's never too late to start doing the right thing. It's never too late to begin to think the way God has told us to think, even if we've done it all wrong up until this very moment.

But if you do know these things before you get married, it's very advantageous. So I want to talk about that. What is the purpose of marriage? Obviously, since people break up their marriages when they don't feel loved, or they don't feel loving, or they don't feel happy, or they don't feel fulfilled, they must feel that marriage is like everything else in their life for them.

Marriage is for their fulfillment, for their happiness. If somebody doesn't make them happy anymore, they should find someone else who does, because my happiness is everything to a narcissist, and we live in a narcissistic society. I'm not talking about people who are psychopaths.

I'm talking about people who are just raised in the educational system of the past generation and with the media of the past generation. We are a me generation. We are a do-your-own-thing generation.

I say we generation. I'm obviously not the same generation as some of you. I'm talking about my generation, like the who did.

And we were just taught, you know, do your own thing. I wasn't, because I was raised a Christian, and my parents were real Christians, and I became a Christian when I was young, and I got filled with the Spirit when I was 16, and I've served the Lord since then. So I never really, you know, imbibed that philosophy in my generation, but I moved to Santa Cruz when I was 20 years old and did street ministry for years, and talking to the

street people and the university students and stuff, I certainly got an earful of what the Spirit of the Age is teaching people.

And now those people are the college professors teaching other people. That's one of the scariest things. But the truth is the world does not think that anything exists except for themselves, and marriage is just one of those things they can exploit for their own happiness.

If they don't think it will make them happy, they certainly won't consider getting married. And I'm not saying you should. As a Christian, I'm not sure Christians should consider getting married if they don't think it's going to make them happy in a way, because you shouldn't marry someone that you don't feel you're very compatible with.

You shouldn't marry someone that you don't feel you'll find it relatively easy to love. But if you marry them and find out you're not as compatible as you thought, and they're not as easy to love as you thought, well, you're in. You're still in, and now you know what your lessons are.

Your challenges are defined for you. An unhappy marriage doesn't release you from marriage. It only defines what your challenges are going to be, what you have to overcome in yourself, mostly.

You don't have to overcome your spouse. You probably could never do that, especially if you're the man. But the woman probably can't either.

But you can overcome yourself. And if you are surrendered to God, if you're dying to self, if you're doing what the Bible calls every Christian to do, you can at least be a blessing to your spouse, even if they're not a blessing to you. And you can model Christ, and you can glorify God.

And the first thing that is the goal of every Christian who's thinking in a Christian way is to glorify God. Paul said, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it to the glory of God. Jesus said, let your light shine before men so they'll see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Jesus said, in this my Father is glorified that you bring forth much fruit, so shall you be my disciples. As a disciple of Jesus, I have one goal, to bring forth much fruit so that God is glorified. The glory of God is the purpose of the universe's existence.

The heavens declare the glory of God. And if it's the purpose of the universe's existence, it's the purpose of my existence too, and the purpose of everything that I allow into my life or that God allows into my life. My marriage, my children, whatever, they are for the glory of God.

And when I'm married or contemplating marriage, I might be thinking, you know, I'm

lonely, I'm unfulfilled, I'm unloved, I'm horny. Let's be real. We're in church, but church people have to be real too.

People get married for those reasons, in many cases. And yet, Christians are supposed to be thinking, but would it glorify God for me to stay in this marriage, leave this marriage, get married to this person, or wait for someone else. I can think, I would be very happy with this person, but what if they're not spiritually suited? What if they're not the kind of person I want raising my children for God? You know, there's an awful lot to contemplate, and all of it has to be focused on one major concern.

Is God going to be glorified? I've got to be a person obsessed with this one thing, that I will glorify God in everything I do, and especially, if possible, in my marriage. That's my determination. So we have to understand that the purpose of marriage, like the purpose of everything, is the glory of God.

And once you are in a marriage, you are now a steward of another soul, and maybe of others, as children come along. You now have responsibilities, management responsibilities, and you're managing them for God because they're His. You see, Jesus said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, his own life also, he can't be my disciple.

We have to actually see ourselves totally devoted to Christ, and all the other relationships are in the flow chart, somewhere below that. Jesus said to His disciples, any of you who have left father, mother, wife, children, or lands for my sake, shall have a hundredfold. He's not talking about really leaving your wife.

I think He's probably talking about people who have chosen not to get married when they would rather have done so, but for the kingdom of God, they're eunuchs for the kingdom of God's sake, and they've forsaken marriage in that respect. But the point is, marriage, family, children, even your parents, your spouse, they are all part of the whole thing that God has brought into your life as something to glorify Him in. Now, you glorify God by loving your spouse, by blessing your spouse, by cultivating a relationship in the marriage that is desirable as people look on and say, I wish my marriage was that way.

I wish my husband treated me that way. I wish my wife was, you know, that way. I wish our marriage was that way.

If people look at your marriage and see that, and they say, well, these people are doing this differently than we do, but that's because they're Christians, they're doing some kind of Christian thing. This must be the way God wants things done. And it's good.

It's better. People should look at Christian marriages and say, that's better. And that should be easier as time goes on, since modern marriages are not very stable.

Unfortunately, the church tends to follow the world fairly closely, and so if worldly

marriages are not stable, the marriages in the churches tend to be not so stable. And this is what has to be resisted at all costs. If you know of a Christian, and by the way, I'm not, I'm addressing those of you who are not married yet, I'm addressing those of you who are married, and I'm also addressing anyone who's married or unmarried who will ever be in a position to talk to people about marriage.

People who are thinking about bailing out of their marriage. People who are thinking about getting married. People who are unhappy in their marriage.

What are you going to say to them? You're going to meet them. They're everywhere. And they're in the church.

And we have to address these things from the worldview that God has supplied us with in the scripture. And we need to turn people back. When we counsel about anything, whether it's marriage or any other issue in life, the main thing we need to be counseling is, you need to do that which will glorify God.

Now you might say, well, what if they don't care about glorifying God? Well, then there's not an awful lot you can say that's going to fix their problem. Because a Christian, if they don't want to glorify God, what they need most is to become a better Christian, a real Christian. A Christian that has denied themselves and taken up their cross to follow Jesus.

So that God will be glorified. You see, too many people are trying to keep their own agendas in life and add God onto it as a postage stamp, or a hand stamp they can show at the gate to heaven. See, I'm in.

But I really, everything else, except this hand stamp that says I'm a Christian, doesn't look like a Christian. But I get the best of all worlds. We need to regain, rediscover the core value of the Christian life, which is to glorify God.

And we have to counsel Christians and ourselves. When it comes to difficulties in relationships, that there's one way to live in a relationship that glorifies God. There's other ways that don't, but might please us more.

And it's got to be God's glory that is the first thing. And we recognize now we have a stewardship, a responsibility. God has given me a wife to take care of for your woman, and he's given you a husband to take care of, children perhaps.

This is something that you've got to put above yourself, above your own preferences, above your own happiness. If you're not happy in your marriage, offer that unhappiness as a sacrifice to the Lord and glorify him in the marriage anyway. Try to be happier.

But if you're not happy and can't make yourself happy, at least make your spouse happy. If that can't be done, die trying. That's really what you've got to be committed to.

If you're not going to do that, don't get married. If you're already married and you don't want to do that, shame on you. You need to get that in your head because you're married and you've got these responsibilities.

You've got a stewardship, and it's required in a steward to be found faithful, all said. Now, having talked about the center and the purpose of marriage is for God, not for me, I want to talk about the nature of marriage a little bit, biblically, because it's so different than what the world thinks. I mentioned it is covenantal.

In Malachi, God is taking Israel to task because many of the men were divorcing their wives. And it's in Malachi 2. He rebukes them about that, and he says to them in verse 14, Yet she is your wife and your companion by covenant. That is to say, you've divorced her, but you still have a covenant obligation to her.

This is even after a divorce because the divorce was ungrounded. What does it mean to be in a covenant? A covenant is a situation where two people make promises to each other with the determination that they must keep them. Now, there are some things that can get a person out of a covenant, but it's not something that they themselves will do.

It's something the other party does. But there's not very many things. A marriage covenant is not really broken as far as we know in Scripture except by two possible things.

One is one party is unfaithful to the other, cheats sexually, and the other is one party is not a Christian and abandons the Christian and won't live with them anymore, and they bail out of the covenant. If, obviously, one party to the covenant has trashed the covenant and not interested anymore, there does seem to be in the Scripture freedom of the other party to not be in it. But it shouldn't be a freedom that was welcomed or desired because no one should desire to be free from an unhappy marriage.

They should desire to make a happy marriage because that's what glorifies God. I don't think divorce ever glorifies God, but that doesn't mean that if you've been through a divorce, you can never glorify God again. Obviously, God redeems bad situations.

A divorce is a bad situation. It's not a good thing. But God can redeem the situation.

Something good can come from it. That doesn't make what was bad good in itself. And we should, you know, if God supernaturally or sovereignly overrides a situation, so we can't stop a partner from leaving us and divorcing us, well, we can trust that God will make something good in our lives, at least, if we're submitted to Him.

Those who submit to Him can always trust that He's got their situation in hand and that His plans are for good for you and they're pleasant. That doesn't mean there won't be persecution. It doesn't mean there won't be sorrow.

That doesn't mean it's not a good thing just because you're sorry or grieving. Grief is a good thing. Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn.

That's a good thing sometimes. It depends. The thing I'm trying to get across to you is that we shouldn't be thinking about our own happiness primarily at all in any realm of life and certainly not in marriage.

It will not work if you're married and you're seeking your happiness and your spouse is seeking their happiness. It just doesn't work. At least one party has got to be devoted to the other person's happiness and in a perfect marriage, both parties are.

Are there perfect marriages? Obviously, that's a relative term. But there certainly are marriages that feel perfect to be in. I know because I'm in one.

I don't know if my wife thinks this feels perfect, but I'm in a great marriage right now. It probably isn't perfect, but I'm not sure what the imperfections are. I'm enjoying it very much.

The point is, though, that what makes a marriage approximate perfection is the degree to which both parties are interested in pleasing the other more than pleasing themselves. That is, a covenant you make is a lifelong contract which can only be broken by very, very extreme circumstances. Short of those circumstances, you keep that promise.

You keep that covenant. That covenant was not just that you'll stay with them, but that you'll love and cherish them. At least most people who take regular marriage vows say something like that.

I'll love, I'll cherish, I'll forsake all others. That means visually as well as any other way. It refers to my mind even with just flirtatious behavior.

I mean, there's husbands and wives that would never, they think, cheat, but they'd enjoy a little bit of flirtation at the office or somewhere. It's a little fun to get that kind of excitement, that kind of attention from someone else. Now, that's not forsaking all others.

When you become married, you belong to your partner. There's actually a possessive aspect of it. Now, this is very unpopular in modern independent Western thinking that anyone, as it were, could own anyone else.

It almost sounds like slavery. It's not slavery, but there is legitimate possession. Paul said that the husband has no right over his own body, but his wife has that right.

And the wife has no right over her own body, but her husband has that right. Now, obviously, if both people are thinking, I've got no right to myself, my wife or my husband

has that right. And if both are thinking that way, it's going to be wonderful, you know, because no one's going to be demanding their rights.

But if you have a right to somebody, that means that there's a sense of possession there. That's why adultery is such a violation, because it is violating the right that was voluntarily given to your partner to be exclusively theirs. In Proverbs, it talks about how committing adultery is different than other kinds of sins in certain respects.

Not to say it's the most terrible sin, but I don't know of many that are worse. It is said that adultery is the most cruel, nonviolent act that anyone can commit. Anyone ever had an unfaithful spouse? I think you'd agree.

You'd rather they had done anything, certainly any other nonviolent act you would have preferred. Maybe even in some cases you'd have preferred some violent acts to that. But adultery is the most cruel, nonviolent crime you can commit against a person.

And Proverbs chapter 6 talks about it being different than many other kinds of sins. He says in Proverbs 6, verse 30, People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he's starving. Yet, when he is found, he must restore sevenfold.

He may have to give up all the substance of his house. If he is hungry and he stole, he might have to make restitution at great expense to himself. But no one hates him for stealing food.

When they know he's hungry, they can kind of relate with it. There may be penalties he has to face, but you don't have any trouble understanding why he fell into that temptation. But he contrasts that, verse 32, But whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding.

He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor will he get, presumably from the woman's husband. And his reproach will not be wiped away.

For jealousy is a husband's fury. Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not accept any recompense, nor will he be appeased, though you give him many gifts.

A jealous husband. One of the things that's really considered to be uncool in modern society is jealousy. I've heard women complain, My husband's so jealous over me.

If I just talk to another guy, or I know a wife who is very jealous of her husband because a lot of women were paying attention to him, and he said, Well, I can't accommodate my wife's irrational jealousy. I'm going to still be friendly to the other sisters in the church and things like that. Man, you're crazy.

Your wife is jealous of you because she owns you. Literally. You belong to her.



That was made an agreement you made by covenant. And it's true you shouldn't be irrationally jealous. But God is jealous over his people.

Because jealousy is a husband's fury. A husband who can watch his wife flirt with other men, or can know that she's being courted by other men, and he doesn't feel any jealousy. I don't think he values his marriage.

I don't think he knows what marriage is. I think he's still thinking of it. They're kind of playing the field a little bit.

If you know that marriage means that you've been stuck together with super glue into one flesh, then you realize that whatever happens in any compromise to your spouse is compromising you as well. You're one flesh. And you're jealous over their purity.

You're jealous over their sanctity. Now, again, selfish jealousy is a different thing. I'm jealous because I'm missing out and someone else is getting some attention.

That's sinful jealousy. But to be jealous over your children when you see somebody trying to lure them away from Christ, or jealous over your husband or your wife when you see an outsider trying to lure them away from the marriage, that jealousy is a natural and even a godly response. Because God has that jealousy toward his people.

When they went after other idols, he was jealous. And that's just something that our society doesn't like to acknowledge. But jealousy has a legitimate place in marriage because there is a legitimate sense of ownership in a way of each other that's different.

More than even you own your children. Again, you're borrowing those from God until they grow up. Then someone else is going to own them.

You're going to be with that spouse, hopefully, for your whole life. And the more you can do to keep that bond unbroken and in its proper way, the better it will be for all parties, especially for God's glory. A marriage is a sovereign unit.

And what I mean by that, when it says in Genesis 2.24, For this cause a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. What happens when people get married is they leave a solidarity that they were born into and which they belonged to for a while. And now they form a new solidarity which they now belong to for the rest of their life or at least their spouse's life.

It's a new family. It's not answerable in the same way to the family you came out from. When you are in your parents' home, under their leadership, obviously, honoring your parents and everything they want you to do, unless it's bad, is good.

But once you're married, you've got to kind of break the strings with the parents in terms of their control over the new unit. Your husband or your wife is not going to appreciate

your parents' control over the marriage if it's allowed to happen. You have to realize there's a reason why women change their name when they get married.

They had their father's name because they were part of his solidarity, under his headship. The father gives away the bride to the groom. Now you might say, well, that's just custom.

That's not what the Bible says. But actually, it is kind of. It's codified into custom in Western civilization, but it's really the teaching of Scripture.

In the Scripture, you see marriages formed by fathers giving away their daughters to the groom with the daughter's approval, hopefully. But still, the father is the one in charge of the girl until the husband becomes in charge of her. She needs someone to protect her, it is assumed.

This is a very uncomfortable thing to say in our modern society because we've been taught for 50 years now that a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle. But God seems to think things are better when women have a man to protect them. And sure, there's a lot of strong women.

Hopefully, all women should be strong. And when they don't have a man, there's widows who don't have a husband, or divorcees who don't have a husband through no fault of their own. They've got to be strong.

But that doesn't mean that's the best situation for them. God set things up so that women would be protected by their fathers until there's another man who will protect them. And when he does, that starts a new sovereign unit.

She changes names because she now is part of her husband's unit, not her father's unit. And what's interesting in feminist culture is that some women don't want to take their husband's name. They want to keep their maiden names because they're expressing, I'm not going to take a man's name.

But the maiden name is a man's name, it's her father's name, it wasn't her mother's name. You can't get away from having a man's name. You either take your husband's name or you take your dad's name.

There's no other options. Unless you want to make up a name from scratch. But you shift when marriage takes place.

Even the man leaves his father, not just the woman, and they become one new unit. And Jesus said, you don't break that unit up. That's a sovereign unit.

I really believe that the government doesn't have very much say over that unit unless there's criminal activity going on in it. If a man or woman is committing criminal acts

against their spouse or their children, I think the government needs to step in. That's what government's for, to take care of criminals.

But where there's not criminals, I don't think the government has any right to tell parents how to educate their children or really how to discipline their children, again, unless it's abusive and criminal. But this is something that God set up where the family is the unit of the husband, the wife, and any children God gives them that stands as a sovereign unit. Yes, it's part of larger society and needs to be seen as such because sometimes when people break up their marriages, they say, well, it just affects us.

Why should anyone else care? It doesn't just affect the couple. It affects the whole society. It affects the church if they happen to be Christians.

It certainly affects their friends and families, and it affects their children disastrously. And it's not just you. The family unit is a sovereign unit, and it's part of society too.

But in terms of governing the family, that is largely to be done internally. Certainly receiving counsel from outside is a good idea, even from parents. But to have the parents of the spouses calling the plays, like on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, that mother is so overbearing.

I can't imagine how any husband or wife would endure that. And yet it's comic because it's so stereotypical, really, of so many, in that case, Italian mothers. But there's other mothers who are not Italian who do the same thing.

You've got to have a sovereign unit in your home. Respect your parents, but don't let them control it. You leave your father and mother to become a married person.

And ideally, it's a permanent and monogamous arrangement. Yes, there have been marriages that were not monogamous. David, for example, even Abraham and Jacob had multiple wives.

This was not how God designed marriage to be. We're not told that they sinned by doing it because God didn't forbid it in the Old Testament, but he didn't design it that way. And he didn't design it to be ended ever by divorce.

Two things in Old Testament marriage were tolerated that were not the way God designed it to be. One was polygamy, and one was divorce. And when Jesus was asked about divorce, he said, well, that's not the way God made it to be.

It was permitted, he said, because of the hardness of your hearts. And no doubt polygamy was also permitted because of considerations like that. But Christians are looking for a way to glorify God, not get away with however much God might permit.

And God did not design marriage to be anything other than monogamous. I believe God

made people emotionally so that they're really only supposed to be emotionally attached to one person of the opposite sex in their life romantically. Now, that sounds very old-fashioned, almost silly, because we all date around, we all have trial-and-error relationships.

That's how we're raised to do it. But who can say that that hasn't damaged us? Who's to say that having multiple relationships in life before you get married hasn't damaged marriage itself? They say breaking up is hard to do, but it gets easier with practice. And if you break up with relationships before you get married, well, it's just kind of taught you, you can break up.

And many people apply that same ethic to their marriage, too. In the Bible, at least, and I'm not saying we can duplicate everything in biblical culture because it was Middle Eastern culture, ancient culture, but actually there were some principles they followed that were not bad to try to approximate if we can. The daughters were kept very protected until the right man came along.

Now, we don't have that kind of situation in our society, but however we can approximate it, I think, is wise. If we don't just give our hearts out, if you're single, don't give your heart out to a bunch of different people. Because if you don't end up marrying them, they'll give you back the pieces, less of you.

There's going to be people walking all over the town who've got parts of your heart. My wife made a joke about some friends just this morning that you know each other way too well to ever separate. And that's kind of that with relationships when they're romantic.

You kind of bury your soul, and then if it ends, they take a lot of that soul of yours with them. You have less of it to give to someone else, and what you have is tainted. It's very much to be desired, if possible, to have very few, ideally one romantic relationship in your lifetime.

Now, we're not in an ideal world. People die, and you can remarry. People leave you, and you can remarry.

But that's not what anyone should choose. That's not what God chose. It was not so in the beginning.

When God made marriage, it was one man, one woman, and it was for life. And that's what Jesus indicated we should aim at when we consider marriage. We have to accommodate for the fact that things have changed since the Garden of Eden.

There's sin and there's death, and both of those things interfere with these things sometimes. But we shouldn't be the ones sinning. If our marriages break up, we should be sure it's not us that's doing it.

As much as in you lies, as much as possible, Paul said, be at peace with everyone, and that would especially be with your spouse. Now, I want to talk about why it's permanent monogamous, because it's supposed to be safe for intimacy and safe for children. Marriage was made for intimacy, but it's also made for children.

And it's never ideal for children to be raised by someone other than their two natural parents. It can work out. If a kid has a dad who goes off to prison, and he's a murderer and so forth, and the mother marries a real nice Christian guy, and he's a good dad, it can work out for the good.

But it would have been more ideal if the man who fathered them had been a good father, had been a Christian, had stepped up and done his duty. It's always ideal for children to be raised by their actual parents. I'm not saying they can't survive or can't thrive with step-parents, but it's just not ideal.

Every child, I think, wants to be raised by their two natural parents. I've read statistics about this, where couples say, well, we're just not getting along, we're fighting so much, it's bad for the kids to see us fight like this. It'd be better for them if we just split up.

Lots of people reason that way when they want to end their marriage, but surveys indicate that kids in those marriages, kids who are watching those parents, they want their parents to stay together. They'd rather have their parents stay together unhappy than separate. And, of course, there's great dangers to children with step-parents and so forth that don't usually involve their real parents.

A monogamous, lifelong situation, which is what marriage is supposed to be, is to be safer for children, and safer for your own intimacy, because, as I said, when you get intimate with someone, and you do when you get married, certainly, they get to know your soul in ways that no one else is allowed to, and your body, too, in ways that no one else is allowed to. There's intimacy there that shouldn't be shared outside that marriage. But if you go from partner to partner to partner, it's not safe for intimacy, because usually when you go from one partner to the next, partner A is not still on good terms with you, because the partner you leave, you leave because you're angry or upset or they didn't please you, and then you take their secrets with you and blab them to whoever you want to.

There's no safety in a marriage that's not going to stay together to bear your soul, to share your secrets, and so forth. A lifelong relationship between a man and a woman is the only ideal that God ever had for marriage. And while God can make something good from a bad situation, we should never be the ones who put him in that position to have to do it.

We shouldn't be handing him a bad situation that we caused. If that happens apart from us, then we can trust that he'll make it better for us, and hopefully for all parties.

Marriage is for grown-ups only.

I had a high school teacher that said that. He was a Christian, but not a very outspoken one. I remember he said in social psychology class, which we had to take, I didn't like it, but I liked him.

He always used to say, marriage is for grown-ups. And what he meant is you've got to have not only have a grown-up body, you've got to be mature. You've got to have some qualities that children aren't born with.

Children are born narcissistic. Children are born caring only about their own appetites, their own happiness, their own comfort. But maturity is a process by which you learn there's other people in the world whose needs are at least equivalent to yours.

They have rights too, and you really can't claim that they have to sacrifice all their rights just for you. And when you really become a mature, socially well-adjusted person, you realize that actually there's something to be said for putting other people's rights ahead of your own sometimes. Giving to the poor when you're not required to do so.

Forgiving people when you could get away with not doing so. Giving up your rights. This is something that's part of being an adult.

Not all adults get there, but the degree to which you get there is the degree to which you're an adult, and the degree to which you're an adult is the degree to which you're probably going to be able to make it in marriage. If you have learned how to be happy and content as a single person, then you're probably going to be able to be happy and content in marriage, even one that's not very satisfying. I've found my happiness in Christ from my teenage years on, and I would say I've had a couple of marriages that weren't very happy in terms of their description of the circumstances.

They were not happy circumstances in some cases. But I was a happy person, I believe. I didn't walk around with a waxy smile on my face.

That's not what happiness is. Sometimes you're grieving. Jesus said, happier are those who grieve, happier are those who mourn.

There's an inward happiness, a satisfaction that comes from knowing that you've got a clear conscience, that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing for God and to your mate, and if other things are not as you wish they were, well, you're doing what you can do, the rest is in God's hands. And there's a certain peace and joy that comes from that. And if you can learn to be happy as a single person and content because you've got God, then you can be that even in a marriage that isn't contributing to your happiness.

One of the biggest problems in marriages is that people marry hoping that the other person will make them happy. They weren't very happy single, or they weren't very

happy in a previous marriage, and they're looking for someone who can patch them up and make them feel happy in a new situation. And that's not the right reason to get married.

If you can't be happy without a spouse, you're probably not going to be happy with one because no matter how good your spouse is, they can't make you be happy, much as they may want to. I know this from experience. I wanted nothing more than for my wife, my ex-wife, to be happy.

I exhausted all the things I could do. I explored, I researched, I asked her, and no matter what I did, it didn't make her happy because she didn't want to be happy. I'm very sorry to say, I'm not trying to put her down.

I'm just saying it was something that was a hopeless errand. I even said to her once, I said, how come the more things I do for you, the more you seem antagonistic toward me? She says, because I think you're doing them to try to manipulate me. I said, to manipulate you to do what? She said, to like you.

That's an interesting outlook. I'm trying to manipulate her to like me. I did want her to like me, for sure.

Don't you want to be liked by your spouse? But that wasn't why I was doing it. I just thought, you can't win. You serve them, you do what you can, you accommodate, and they just look through this jaded lens.

You can't help it if you can't make somebody happy if they won't be happy. And if you won't be happy, no one can make you happy, and you shouldn't marry someone thinking that they can. This is something that's between you and God.

If you've got a healthy relationship with the Lord, then you won't depend on other people to make you feel completed. Though it is a very completing thing to find a good spouse, that comes as sort of a byproduct of you being the one who serves them, and them being like-minded and want to serve you. Then it's all good for everybody.

You do have to know how to die to yourself, though, to be married. And that just means that you're willing to give up your dreams and your rights, even your satisfaction in marriage. You can be satisfied in marriage if there's nothing in the marriage to satisfy you.

But your satisfaction would come in from somewhere other than the marriage, from God. If you're satisfied with Jesus, then you're satisfied. Even in a life situation that is either single or unhappily married, you're satisfied.

I know this, too, from experience. I've been a satisfied man all my life. I've often wished things were different in my family life in some cases, but I've never felt that I was lacking

in anything necessary for my happiness, because I've had the Lord.

And this is what every Christian should be able to testify to. So, being married commits you for life to something. And it's not always easy to keep that commitment, but it's not negotiable.

It has to be kept, and therefore you have to have the resources in your spirit. You have to have the kind of relationship with God that sustains you, that gives you grace in those times, and that makes you capable of glorifying God in the relationship. Now, in the notes I've given you, I'm not going to go over them, because I'm actually going to have to give you a break, and we're going to go to the next page of notes.

So, I've skipped over a lot in the notes. But the part I'm not covering here in our lecture is the part that's called the work of marriage. And it talks about what the Bible says about what husbands are commanded to do, what wives are commanded to do, and with reference to the rearing of children together also.

There's some material there that I think every Christian married or can constantly be married should be aware of, should know, because the Bible does define not only marriage, but the individual roles in marriage. I want to say this too. I don't think we should be legalistic.

I don't think Jesus is legalistic, and I don't think God is. I think that we need to be walking in the spirit, not necessarily walking by laws and rules. But, walking in the spirit means we're seeking the mind of the spirit about things.

And when we read the scriptures, we're finding there the mind of the spirit. And if the scripture says husbands should do this kind of thing and should be this kind of way, that's what the spirit of God is revealing to us through the word. If it says wives should do this or that, that's what the spirit of God wants us to know.

Walking in the spirit is not the same thing as walking legalistically by a bunch of rules. But it is pretty much following what the scripture says, because the scriptures were inspired by God. And frankly, there's hardly anything we need divine instruction more about than marriage.

Partly because, again, the culture has lost total track of what marriage is. And even if it didn't, even if we were in a culture that affirmed the biblical marriage models, we still have our own fallen nature. We still have our own selfishness that militates against doing things right in marriage.

And therefore, to continually be informed by scripture of what the mind of the spirit is for husbands and wives is pretty important in order to make this work. Well, this hour has gotten away from me very fast. And I'm going to be coming to the second page of our notes after we take a stretch break.



Thank you.