Pure - God's Design for Marriage

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[0:00] Genesis chapter 2 verses 18 to 25.

The Lord God said, It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. Now the Lord God has formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air.
He brought them to the man to see what he would name them and whatever the man called each living creature, that's what its name. That was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.
But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.
Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib that he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man. The man said, This is now bones of my bones and flesh of my flesh.
[1:12] She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. Our next reading is in 1 Corinthians 7, verses 1-9.
And that's from page 1148. Chapter 7, verses 1-9.
Now for the matters you wrote about. It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.
The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband.
[2:19] In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am, but each man has his own gift from God.
One has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows, I say, it is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
Thank you. Well, it's getting very hot and spicy, isn't it?
Reading like that. Well, we need God's help as we look at his word together. So have your pens and your paper at the ready to take notes.
[3:49] Your Bible's open and we'll ask God for his help as we look at this together. Father, there are many things that we take for granted in this world, not least our relationships one to another.

And we see that very often our relationships one to another can become distorted and not what they ought to be. And so we come this morning with just a newness wanting to hear again from you your design for marriage and what it's all about.
We pray for your help for each one of us to understand clearly for myself as I speak this message. and we ask, Father, that you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon us to help us to apply it and to work it into our lives so that our marriage is everything that it ought to be.
And whatever situation that we find ourselves here this morning, whether we are married or whether we are on our own, we pray, Lord, that you would speak to us and show us all the kind of people that we should be.
In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, as we've said at the very beginning, this is a series which we're calling Pure.

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[5:22] And this morning, we start by looking at God's design for marriage. I don't intend to cover absolutely everything that the Bible says about marriage. We have done other talks from Colossians and also Ephesians.

And I'm sure you can look in the website to get talks on that or I can give you notes for it. But here we're going to be looking at 1 Corinthians 7. So, marriage, what's the point?
So, you're married then. Oh no, I would never get married. What's the point in that? We much prefer living together. It's far less complicated.
Now, 20 years ago, such a conversation would have been very rare. In fact, it would have been even frowned upon. Living in sin was the phrase. But today, as we rapidly move from a conservative and religious culture to a more liberal and irreligious culture, the opposite we find is very true.
To talk about getting married is outdated and overrated. Having a partner or a live-in boyfriend or girlfriend is much easier to deal with. After all, you might discover that you're not suited to each other.
[6:38] According to the Iona Institute for Religion and Society, in 1986, there were no figures available for people who were cohabiting.

It was so rare. In 2006, the number of cohabiting couples is almost 122,000. You might think that's a small number, but double it because they're a couple and you're almost at a quarter of a million, which is quite a lot for our small population.
Marriage no longer seems to be a suitable option. And perhaps the reason for this is marriage breakdown has increased by 10% since 1986, from 40,000 to over 200,000.
In fact, today, marital breakdown stands at 27%. So marriage no longer seems to be a viable or a stable option.
So people say, what's the point of getting married? It seems an unnecessary cost. It's complicated if things don't work out. And to be honest, well, it suits if we don't have any formal ties.
[7:55] It seems like there's not a lot going for marriage and even Scripture sends out a warning to those who do consider marriage. Have a look at 1 Corinthians 7 and the middle of verse 28.

Do you see it there in verse 28? Halfway down in the verse. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life.
And I want to spare you this. And all the married couples are nodding their head. So why bother with marriage? marriage? Why don't we all, as they used to say in ages past, let's all live in sin?
Well, I think we've lost our way about marriage and we need to get back to the designer of marriage, the one who created us, the one who loves us and who knows what is best for us. We need to go back to God's design for marriage.
marriage. And we ask the question, what marriage is? Look at verse 1 of chapter 7.
[9:04] Now for the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to marry. 1 Corinthians is a letter written to a church in a culture that was up to its eyes in sexual freedom.

People did whatever they wanted with whoever they wanted. It was a promiscuous and licentious city where anything goes, except, it seems, marriage.
The Christians thought, verse 1, that it was good for a person not to marry. Or if you look at the note in the bottom of your page, there's probably a little A or something at the end of verse 1 and in the note at the bottom it says, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.
In other words, the only way that they were to live in such a sex-crazed society was to live a life of celibacy whether you were single or married.
The Christians thought it was actually more spiritual. It was more holy to abstain even if you were married. And in an attempt to be counter-cultural, they went from one extreme to the other.
[10:18] So Paul seems to address this balance. He wants to put things right. So he says in verse 2, but since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

In fact, back in chapter 6, just a couple of verses back up, in verse 16, he's already referred to God's good order. He's actually for marriage. It was the people in the church who were saying it wasn't good for people to marry.
And Paul's trying to get across the point that, yes, there is a place for marriage. marriage. And in chapter 6, verse 16, there he quotes from Genesis chapter 2, verse 24, where he talks about the two becoming one flesh.

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So what I want us to do now is to jump back into Genesis chapter 2 to get the foundation of which Paul builds his whole argument. So let's go back to Genesis chapter 2 and verse 20.
Genesis chapter 2 and starting in at verse 20.
[11:37] We read there, But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib. He had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man and the man said with his roses in hands and his great romance, this is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh and she shall be called woe man for she was taken out of man.
For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.
So marriage is part of God's good design and order for the world. It was one of the things he established at creation. It is a gift to us but it comes with special conditions.
We see this in verses 24. It is to be exclusive between a man and a woman and not involving anyone else or any other partners.
[12:46] It is also to be permanent. They are to leave their father and mother. They are not to live in with their father and mother but they are to set up home together and be united together.

To be permanent together. And it is to be sexual as they become one flesh. A seal of their commitment to one another.
Now while all of this is true it doesn't tell us what the real purpose of marriage is. If you ask people today why they get married you will get a range of answers. You will get something like this because I love him.
Because I want to spend the rest of my days with her. So I can have sex. To get legal status and benefit from the tax breaks. Because I am lonely and needed security.
There are all the reasons people might give. But none of those is the reason that God gives. Look at chapter 2 verse 18. The Lord God said it is not good for the man to be alone.
[13:56] I will make a suitable helper for him. Now when God says that we read it and we think poor Adam he is all alone. He needs someone to satisfy his loneliness.

And that is why you get married so that you are not lonely anymore. But that is not what he actually says is it? God does not say I am going to make a suitable companion.
No, God says I am going to make a suitable helper. And it is the same in verse 20. In the middle of verse 20 but for Adam no suitable helper was found.
So God did the rib thing and he got a woman and he presented the woman before the man and there became one flesh. Now the purpose for them coming together the reason why God brought them together we have to go back to Genesis chapter 1 verse 27.
And there we read in chapter 1 verse 27 God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him male and female.
[15:04] He created them. God blessed them and he said to them be fruitful and increase in number fill the earth and subdue it rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

So the man and the woman were to come together for the purpose of being fruitful that they would increase in number so that they would have kids. But that's not all.
Together they are to rule over the world in which they live. They are to rule over it. They are to care for the world in which they live. They are to manage it.
Now if Adam was to do this on his own it would be a pretty big task wouldn't it? He couldn't do all that work on his own. He needed a helper. Somebody who would come alongside and help in the work.
And so a woman was provided. And to be honest the man and woman they couldn't do it on their own either. They needed a family. So God had said they were to be fruitful and increase.
[16:11] They were to have a family of gardeners to take care of God's good creation. Now of course that doesn't mean that they all headed off to university to become horticulturalists.

Gardeners is simply a metaphor for serving God the way that he has planned. Christopher Ash, the author, put it in his book, like this.
It's called Married for God. And this is what he says, as we rejoice with the lovers in the garden, we must not forget that there is work to be done. The garden needs gardening.

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God's world needs careful watch and careful work. You see, God's purpose for marriage is mission. This is God's mission for his people. people. It's not just to meet the need of loneliness. It's not just so people can have sex. It's about serving God's greater plan and purpose.
[17:13] And as we look at the world today, we see that over the centuries, people have been fruitful. The world has been populated. They have obeyed the command. There's now over 10 billion people in the world.

But rather than gardeners who care for the world, we've become vandals, haven't we? Mankind has wrecked the world in which we live.
We don't take care of it. And the world is broken, not just physically, but socially. Marriages break up, families fall apart, children are having to live with people who aren't their parents.
And socially things are broken down, and morally and spiritually. And this is the world in which we live. And God has a purpose for the marriage unit in the context of all this mess.
To quote again from Christopher Ash, he says, the creator entrusts to married couples the awesome privilege and responsibility of procreating potential gardeners to join his team.
[18:22] In other words, to build a family. They are to work, to teach, to discipline and pray that they will grow up into adult actual gardeners who learn to love God and care for his world.

So God's whole design, his whole purpose for marriage is to be like a little unit living under God's rule within the community in which they live, love.
Demonstrating to the world and witnessing to the world what it actually looks like to live under God's care and under his rule and to express God's love out through the family to others.
So marriage is a witness and a demonstration of how we should live in this world. It's all part of God's mission and it is God's means for bringing change and healing to a broken and a hurting world.
So marriage isn't just something that's kind of come up from nowhere. It was God's design from the very beginning to show people what it is to live orderly and correctly in God's world.
[19:37] So that kind of looks at the first thing, a definition if you like, of what marriage is. Which brings us on to, well, why should we marry? Why should we marry?

And we need to take all of what we've said so far and bring it with us back to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Because that is the foundation to which Paul builds the rest of what he goes on to say.
Now while mission may be the primary reason for marriage, and I want to underline primary, there is also a very practical reason. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 1 and 2.
Now he said, for the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to marry, but since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.
Verse 8. Now to the unmarried and the widows, I say, it is good for them to stay unmarried as I am, and we'll be looking at that more next week.
[20:48] But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. Now Corinth was known for its sexual freedom and its loose lifestyle.

In fact, it was so prominent that it had become integrated into the life of the church. So have a look back at chapter 5, verse 1. chapter 5, verse 1.
It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not even occur even among the pagans, amongst those who aren't Christians.
A man has his father's wife. So somebody's run off with his stepmother. And in chapter 6, verse 16. As quick as they were to go off to the prayer meeting on a Wednesday night, they were as quick to run down to visit the local prostitute.
Verse 16 of chapter 6. Do you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said the two will become one flesh. Verse 18.
[22:03] Flee from sexual immorality. So it was an anything-goes society, immorality, and it was becoming acceptable within church life.

And so Paul's pastoral response is so very practical. Verse 2 of chapter 7. Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.
So he's saying to them very clearly, there is a place for sexual expression. But it's not down in the local brothel. And it's not with your stepmother.
It's to be within the context of marriage. Now, listening here, we may be trying to relate all of this to us, and you might not be particularly attracted to your stepmother or stepfather if you have one.

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And you might be visiting the local brothel. But we can't deny the sexual temptation that surrounds us every day. Easy access to internet porn in the chat rooms.
[23:13] Films and TV programs. Our culture is continually bombarding us, telling us that sexual freedom is good. It's satisfying and it's fulfilling, and it's okay.

Everybody else is at it, so why don't you? And the point is simply this, that it's actually very hard to remain very pure in a sex-crazed world.
The sex drive is very real, and when continually aroused by our culture, and when it's driven to the heart through temptation, it is very difficult for us all, whoever we are, to live rightly.
So to save and to help the poor Christian who is trying to live a pure life in this mad society, and let's face it, our society is no different today, so to try and help the Christian who is trying to live a pure life, Paul says, get married.
Look at verse 9. But if they cannot control themselves, if they can't live properly, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
[24:32] Now some of you know that Kirstie and I were met and engaged and married within nine months, so it was quite clear that Kirstie was burning with passion and she couldn't keep away from me.

But what Paul is saying here in this is, look, don't be trying to force people to remain single.
Don't be trying to force people to live a celibate life. It's not the way to deal with it. We'll look at this next week, but he says there is a gift for singleness and there is a gift for getting married.
And he is saying in a very practical way, that the sexual passion that burns within us, the only place in which it is cooled is within the context of marriage.
And it saves you from a life of brokenness and a life of destruction. And instead what happens within the marriage unit, it becomes the context for bringing help and bringing healing to a sexually disorientated world.
[25:42] world. So he's being very practical about these things. And I want to speak, I suppose, generally but specifically to younger people.

Don't be following the ways of the world. Sexual freedom is not good. It will lead to all kinds of difficulties and all kinds of hurts and suffering.
We must follow God's good order. He has designed the world the way it is and this is the right way to live. There is a place for sexual passion and that is only within the context of marriage.
But I suppose as we look at this, it does raise the question, and we're all probably wanting to ask it, but far too embarrassed to ask it, does that mean that when I get married that I can have sex whenever I want to?
Well, I don't think that's what he's saying. There is a primary reason for marriage and that's mission, God's design and God's order.
[26:51] There's a very practical reason as well as we live in a very sexual immoral world and we have those struggles and there's a way to deal with it, but there's also a way in which we should conduct our marriage.

Look at verse 3. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband.
Now, contrary to what many people think, and I'm talking of people outside the church, perhaps even within the church as well, God is actually for sex. He's not against it.
It's not a naughty thing or a bad thing. It's a good thing. And if you want to know more about that, have a read of Proverbs chapter 5 or read through Song of Solomon and you will see that it is really celebrated.
But again, it is only to be in the context of marriage. And spouses, and here I speak particularly to spouses, we have responsibilities to each other, as he explains in verse 4.
[27:58] Have a look at verse 4. The wife this body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband.

But he doesn't stop there. There's an equality. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife.
Now, what he's talking about here is, I'm calling mutual submission and service. Now, before you all come down on me like a ton of bricks, let me try to explain and work this one out.
Our culture views sexual activity as all about fulfilling my needs and my wants. It's all very me centered. It says get what you can when you can.

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You treat the person however you like to satisfy your own needs. So the person who you are with is just simply treated as an object, a means of gratification.
[29:04] And what that does is it just degrades people. It destroys who they are. It creates fear and it creates mistrust. That's the way in which the world operates.

But that's not the way it has to be with marriage. In marriage, it's about submission. submission. You don't take from the other person.
You give to the other person. You don't demand from your wife. You seek their good. You don't force something from your husband.
You want their best. Your body, when you get married, when we looked at Genesis, the two become one flesh. When you come together, and as it says here in verse 4, your body doesn't belong to you alone anymore.
It belongs also to the other. And that means that it's not about your rights and what you want, but it's about their rights and what they need.
[30:17] So within the context of marriage, you are submitting yourself to the other person. in marriage, you are entrusting yourself, and it is a trust exercise in coming to be married, you are entrusting yourself into the loving care because you know that you are going to be treated sensitively, carefully, and lovingly.

So submission is a mutual submission, one to the other. In summary, we could put it like this, that sexual expression, expression, sexual expression within the marriage, should never be demanded, and it should never be withheld.
Now that's all he says about that in these verses. It doesn't say how often, how much, and that's for each couple here to work out for themselves, and that will be different for every couple.
And they've got to work that out within a loving and caring relationship. But the first thing is mutual submission. Not about your rights, but their rights.
But it's not just mutual submission, there's also to be mutual agreement. Look at verse 5. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.
[31:55] Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because your lack of self-control. Now, I just find scripture so practical, isn't it?

There are times when the married couple need to put everything else to one side and give themselves not to each other but to prayer.
And the prayer life of a married couple is crucial and time needs to be given to pray for specific needs, not least for the marriage itself and for the family. And once again, as it was in verse 4, this isn't to be forced or demanded, but it is to be agreed upon.
There is to be mutual consent. Now, when I was reading through this, I found it a real challenge. When was the last time, and I speak again to married couples, when was the last time that you took time out to pray together as husband and wife?
When did you last do that? Can you remember? I think there's a real imbalance in our lives. People will rush to the counselor because their sex life is in trouble, but you ever hear of people rushing to their pastor or to somebody else because their prayer life is in trouble?
[33:20] there are times when we have to kneel beside the bed instead of jumping into the bed.

And I want to encourage us to think about what it is to pray together as couples. You need to plan. I need to plan. to take time out with my wife.
To pray together. To pray for your children if you have children. To pray not only that they would have a great career and they'd be very healthy and successful, but ultimately that your children would come to love God and follow God.
That they would become people who would example what a marriage is meant to look like. I had parents who prayed for me in that way.
Right from the very beginning, if it was God's will, they prayed that I would have a wife. And the first day that I brought Kirstie back home, in a very embarrassing way, my mother said, oh, you're the one we've been praying for.
[34:30] How embarrassing was that? Anyway, thanks, mum. She still stayed with me. It was Kirstie, by the way. Although she called her by the wrong name, she called her Denise instead of Kirstie.

I'll tell you about Denise another day. But the point is that marriage is good. Marriage is important.

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Sorry, prayer is important. And we need to conduct that rightfully and in the proper place within marriage. But, and there's a big but there in verse 5, never use prayer as an excuse for withholding yourself from your spouse.
So, none of this, sorry dear, can we pray again tonight. Look at what it says at the end of verse 5. Come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self control.
he is just so practical. There are enough temptations outside of marriage, there are enough things bombarding us. Marriages are under so much pressure that married people should live in such a way that they don't give Satan a chance to ruin and destroy the marriage relationship.
[35:58] So, there is to be mutual submission and there is to be mutual agreement. Which brings us to, I suppose, our summary, the point of marriage.

Look at verse 6. He says, I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am, but each man has his own gift from God.
One has this gift and another has that. Marriage is a gift from God. It's a wonderful gift from God. And we will see that next week that singleness is also a gift from God.
And what is said here in these few verses of chapter 7 is practical advice for those who do get married. So, when we look at verse 6, it says, I say this as a concession, not as a command.
Paul is not commanding that everybody gets married. He's not saying this is what you all have to do. And he is not commanding that everybody has to stay single.
[37:12] But for those who are married, for those who are going to get married, this is what it looks like. And we need to spend time reading through the passages in Scripture that tell us about marriage because sadly many marriages do break down and the Christian marriage is not immune to the pressures.

Kirsty and I are only married still only a few years, but many of our friends, or quite a few, some of those we were in college with, their marriages are no longer together.
And very often the reason is because people begin to look outside of their marriage, they look outside of their spouse to meet their own selfish needs, whether through affairs, or through porn, or through some other means.
And God's word here gives us some very clear direction to those who are married. And if we follow it, it will bring unity, it will deepen trust and oneness.
It will strengthen the relationship. And the stronger the marriage is, the more at one together we are going to be, and the better position we are going to be in to serve God's ultimate purpose.
[38:37] And I want to finish with this, because this is God's ultimate purpose. Marriage is mission. God has brought you together in his plan and in his design, and if you have children, God has blessed you with children.

And he is saying to you, I want your marriage unit to be a light, to be a witness. Your marriage is to be a means of bringing healing to a broken world.
And just as much as through the marriage unit, God can bring healing to a broken world, marriages. God can also, by his grace, bring healing to broken marriages.
God can help. God can restore. Having difficulties and having struggles is not uncommon. It's normal. That's why he said in verse 28, those who marry will face many troubles.
And I want to spare you this. So if you find you are going through struggles and you are going through difficulties, don't hide it. Speak to somebody.
[39:49] Come and speak to me. Come and speak to Kirsty. Go and talk to an older Christian that you know. Because if our marriages are breaking, we can heal no one.

First of all, we must get ourselves right. So, this is God's design for marriage. It is foundational.
He set it out at creation. And it is very practical and it needs to be worked on. So I encourage us all to think through these things more. Talk it through with your spouse, with your husband and with your wife.
Seek to encourage your children in the way that they should go. Let's pray together. God, we thank you so much that you don't leave us alone.
You don't just put us into this world and tell us now you just make the best job that you can. but that you have given us your commands and your direction as to how we should live, particularly within marriage.
[41:14] Again, Father, we pray that you would protect every marriage represented here. Make it strong and make it healthy. May it be a witness and a demonstration of your love.

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may it be a mission within the community where they live. We pray, Father, too, that if there is any marriage that is struggling or finding it difficult at this time, we pray that you would pour out your grace, that you would enable them to find the help and the support.
And we pray for each one of us here, whatever situation we find ourselves in, whether we're looking forward to marriage, whether we're looking back on marriage, that all of us would pray for one another, pray for the strengthening of the relationships, seeking purity in every way.
And we ask, Lord, that we would ever come to you and find the forgiveness that we need for where we get it wrong. Please forgive us and help us to follow your pure and good design.
In Jesus' name, Amen. we're going to sing together. Amen. This song reminds us of the love of Jesus towards us.
[42:59] Amen.

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