

# The Purpose of Marriage

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Date: 31 May 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning again. On the St. Paul's App, we've got an outline for today. We are four weeks in now.! This is the fourth week on a series on marriage.

We kicked off with the mystery of marriage. That is that the gospel of Jesus Christ and marriage explain each other. Marriage is the ultimate human relationship, but it is the penultimate relationship.

It points to the eternal marriage of Christ and his church. Then we moved into the power of marriage. That is, what we saw there was that the problem, if you like, the main havoc-wreaking problem in many marriages and the ever-present problem in every marriage is self-centeredness. And Ephesians 5, which is our main test, says that marriage, everything that Paul writes about marriage that was just read out to us, hangs on verse 21.

And it is the power to fulfill everything that Paul writes about marriage as he describes it. And that is the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, pointing us to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who surrendered his will for our sake, gave himself for us.

[ 1 : 23 ] And therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit transforms us to be selfless. And then last week, it was the meaning of marriage. And that is a permanent and exclusive legal commitment between a man and a woman to share their entire life with the other.

And so this binding legal commitment is what is needed to provide the security for romance and for love to flourish in life, in the married life.

And now we're asking the question, well, now that we've got all that sorted out, what is marriage for? What's its purpose, if you like? What's its goal? That's what we're up to today. Four points, you've got them on the St. Paul's app if you've got that in front of you.

Now, the Bible, as I said right at the very beginning, starts with a marriage. And it ends with a marriage. And in the Bible, it starts with God creating the material universe.

The constant refrain in Genesis 1 and 2 is, He created, he created, he created. And then it says, the wording shifts when God creates humanity.

[ 2 : 39 ] And it says in chapter 1, verse 26, Let us make man in our image and our likeness. That is, the language shifts to being plural.

Let us. But the image and the likeness of God is singular. And so what we have here, right at the very beginning of the Bible, is the earliest glimpse of the Christian teaching that there is one God who is three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Each person of the Trinity is fully, completely, totally God, and yet each person of the Trinity is distinct. And so what we see there, the implications of that, is that the very heart of ultimate reality, as the Christian faith describes it, is personal relationship.

The God of Christianity is community, of mutual love relationships, sacrificing and serving each other two members of the Trinity, and delighting and loving them completely.

They exist for the other two. And so that's the only way, that's the only context where we can come to terms with Genesis 2, verse 18.

[ 4 : 05 ] The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. You see, everything you read in the creation account up to this point is God said and it happened and God declared it to be good.

This is the first time and the only time in the creation account that we read the words, not good, not good. And it's not because it's sin.

It's not because there's a design flaw. I mean, Adam is in perfect paradise, walking and talking with God. He's made in the image of God, who is an us and not a me, and that is what is not good.

Adam is alone. God created us to have such a deep need for human relationships that not even paradise itself can satisfy it.

It's why you can accumulate everything in the world, but if you're alone, it means nothing. You see, what Adam needed, because God brought all the animals in front of him, what Adam needed was a companion who was like him, like him.

[ 5 : 34 ] And so Genesis 2.18, the Lord God said, it is not good for a man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. Now, it says there in the original Hebrew language, God created what the Hebrew language calls or used.

The word used there is an ezer. It means a, it's a word that means helper companion. Quite literally, what he needs is a friend.

Adam needs a friend. So for all you dog lovers out there, a dog is not man's best friend. The concept of helper, and we need to understand this, unless it be taken out of context, helper here is not personal assistant.

That's not what Adam needed. He didn't need someone to schedule stuff for him. He didn't need staff, not looking for a mate or a domestic helper at all. Doesn't mean, the wording in no way applies, and we'll unpack this later in the series.

In no way applies at all, means that the helper, who is any less than Adam, because the woman too is made in the image of God.

[ 6 : 58 ] The Old Testament, the reason why we know it's not less than in any way whatsoever, is because the Old Testament uses the same word in a different context.

And it's describing God. The same word that's used here for Adam's helper is the same word that is used to describe God and his relationship to Israel.

He is, God is Israel's Ezer, companion helper, friend.

And in actual fact, the verb form of Ezer, literally means the one, the friend who saves from danger. And so in the context of Genesis 2, what we're meant to read here is, God provides the man with a friend who delivers him from loneliness.

That's the helper, a companion friend, equal to him, but different from him. And so in Genesis 2, verse 23, we have the very first recorded words of any human being.

[ 8 : 27 ] And this is it, an emphatic outburst. At last, this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. at last.

He says, he looks at the woman that God brings. You're just like me. Sort of.

But he's saying something even deeper. In 2 Samuel 5, we read this, all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, we are your own flesh and blood.

Literally, in the Hebrew there, it's, we are your own flesh and bone. The same language is used in the Old Testament that Adam uses here when describing Eve, same language is used within the context of a covenant relationship.

You see, what's happening here is that when they come to David, they're not saying, we're your family. David is king of Judah and Israel's looking for a king.

[ 9 : 48 ] In biblical language, flesh and bone represent weakness and strength. The flesh decays. The bone doesn't. It's a sign of one's weakness and one's strength.

And so they're not making a statement that hey, we're family. They're making a statement of commitment to David, loyalty to him as their king.

They're making a covenant statement. We will be loyal to you, King David, committed to you through all the ups and the downs, the high points and the low points in our future together.

And so when God brings the woman to the man in Genesis 2, his first words are not, what a babe. The first recorded words are what would we call equivalent to wedding vows.

In weakness and strength, in richer and poorer, sickness and in health, I am committed to you. my friend. So in the beginning, what we see here, God gave the man a companion to be his spouse.

[ 11 : 19 ] And in fact, the female speaker in the Song of Songs echoes Adam's words in chapter 5, verse 16, where she says, this is my lover, this is my friend.

Marriage, expand the definition somewhat further, marriage is a permanent and exclusive legal commitment between a man and a woman to share their entire lives together as friends.

So let's unpack what a friendship is. What's the biblical idea of friendship? The Bible does a lot, spends a lot of time unpacking what true friendship looks like and we have four main qualities in terms of biblical friendship.

The first is dependability. Proverbs 17, 17, a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity. This is the opposite of the fair weather friend who comes over when things are

successful but when it goes away when your prosperity hits or there's a, you know, your influence wanes or your status drops, you don't have so many Facebook friends anymore or sickness hits or whatever it might be.

Proverbs 18, 24 says, true friends stick closer to a brother including the times of adversity. They are always there with you.

[ 12 : 45 ] They never leave you. The second quality is transparency. Real friends encourage and affirm one another but they also critique one another.

Proverbs 27, better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted but an enemy multiplies kisses.

They just affirm. A true friend like a surgeon will cut you in order to heal you. Proverbs 27, 17 tells us that friends become wiser together through a healthy clash of viewpoints.

As iron sharpens iron so friends sharpen friends. And so you could summarise the first two qualities if you like as true friends will always let you in to who they are but they'll never let you down even when they let you in.

The third quality of friendship is sympathy. Now sympathy is a combination of two Greek words which are synpathos which means common passion.

[ 14 : 15 ] That's what sympathy is. It's not empathy. They're two very different things. Sympathy is a common passion. So friends, friendships are discovered if you like as people discover that they have common interests in things and longings for the same sort of things.

C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* insists if you draw a picture of the difference between erotic romantic love and friendship love he said erotic love is when two people are just looking at each other.

He said friendship is when two people are standing side by side and are fixed on a common passion together. That's friendship.

That's the difference. When we meet another person who shares our common passion there is a potential for a real friendship.

If the real friendship is nurtured beyond the common passion to transparency and a constancy in the relationship if it's just the common passion passions wax and wane you know especially if your friend has got ADHD my goodness they'll change their mind all the time and so friends at stages of life particular passion they come and they go unless there's a constancy and a transparency you see the paradox is that friendship cannot be merely about itself you want a friend I need a friend well let's be friends that's not a friendship it must be about something that both friends are committed to and passionate about besides each other and this has absolutely remarkable application for every single Christian despite the enormous differences that we might have in life we have something in common that is far more powerful than any other common anything we might have in common or far more powerful than supersedes everything that we don't have in common and that is we've all experienced the grace of God in the gospel of the Lord

[ 16 : 47 ] Jesus Christ that is the common passion Christ and so the fourth quality of Christian friendship is a shared goal if your shared goal is a run club one of you breaks a leg and the run club shared goal passion is no longer there the beauty of the Christian shared goal is that it is never ending it always exists the goal is always there any two Christians with nothing else but a common faith in Christ can have a robust friendship that endures to death because they don't just have Jesus in common but they're heading towards Jesus together they're helping each other on their journey towards the new creation as well as doing ministry in the world together and so the picture that the

Bible draws of this spiritual element to friendship this common goal Christ and the common goal is profoundly deep profoundly deep you see Christian friendship which is often when we talk about we need more community Christian friendship is not simply about going to concerts together or enjoying the same sort of sporting events or common interests it is the deep oneness that develops as two people journey together towards the same destination helping one another through the dangers and the challenges along the way it's a relationship that's actually going somewhere for the Christian Christ is meant to be their greatest passion in life and

Christian friendship is sharing that passion and taking that journey together the richest and the best relationships are those that combine if you like both the natural and the supernatural elements we both have a passion for cars and we both have a greater passion for Jesus you know there's those things that link together but the greater one is the supernatural passion it's the one that endures

what marriage does is it builds on those things and it adds to that the supernatural bonds of friendship a romantic bond as well where you don't not just standing side by side looking at Jesus but you're looking at each other as you look to Jesus it's that other element and it's what makes marriage the richest and the deepest of human relationships and so in the Bible marriage is not romance garnished with friendship hopefully over time it is actually friendship that is garnished with romance that's marriage and that's why as the Bible sees it you are married marriage marriage is where you are married to your best friend you see when God brought the man brought this first man his spouse together he brought them together not just as lovers but as the companion friend that the depths of their heart was seeking when

Proverbs 2 17 speaks of one's spouse it uses a very unique word that means your special confidant it means we would say your bestest your BFF your very bestest friends now bear this in mind what this is saying here this is in a day these words are written in Proverbs 2 are written in a day in the age when where women were primarily seen as a husband's property where marriages was a business deal to bring families together and to increase their social status and their security and bear in mind that this is also what that means is it's inconceivable in the day of

[ 22 : 35 ] Proverbs to see your wife as your best friend as much as it is inconceivable for us to do the same thing today what do you mean by that well in modern society with its emphasis on romantic passion sexual chemistry and compatibility it is just as radical to insist that your spouse should be your best friend that's the very foundation you see if you can think back this far to the dating days and for those of you who are hoping for that now it is typical for a single person to walk into a room to see a number of people of the opposite sex and immediately begin to screen those who are appropriate and those who are not appropriate or those who are potential and those who are not potentials and it's got nothing to do with companionship you screen them before you've even spoken to them you eliminate some you've got a pool that you want to fish from and then we start dripping working out who's the most likely candor from here you see so many people go about their dating starting from the wrong end and they end up in marriages that aren't really about anything and they aren't going anywhere and so here's the danger if you see your spouse as mainly a sexual partner or as a financial partner or someone who will nurse you when you get really old you will find over the course of your marriage you will find that you will need pursuits outside of the marriage to fulfill your sense of who you are to fill up your make you feel like you've got a whole soul and when that happens children parents work hobbies a network of close friends will capture your imagination and they will provide you with the joy and the meaning and they will absorb your emotional energy more than your marriage so

Ephesians 5 31 is quoting the very first marriage in Genesis 2 where it says for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh ancient cultures in this day even in Ephesians 5 put enormous emphasis on the parent child relationship enormous emphasis in such a way that pleasing your parents and being faithful to the wishes of your parents is all important all important in more traditional cultures even today parents and grandparents are given great authority and children are expected to heed their parents wishes above all requests the relationship that most shapes our life whatever cultural background you come from shapes our life of who we are is our relationship with our parents up to a certain point and yet nowhere!

in the biblical account of creation did God put a parent and a child together in the garden of Eden nowhere he put a husband and a wife and what we are meant to see and everything from this moment we're meant to see is the relationship with your spouse supersedes all other relationships including the parental relationship the moment you get married marriage must be more important to you than absolutely everything else absolutely everything else there is no human being should get more of your love your energy your activity and your commitment than your spouse the wedding vows that we take are very clear of this in terms of the traditional wedding vows Christian wedding vows it uses it picks it up from

Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5 and it's very clear the vow that you make is forsaking all others the all others is not forsaking other potential spouses it is all others it is very symbolic in a traditional service when the father comes with the bride down the aisle and stands before me there is a certain point where I ask the question who brings this bride to be married to this man this groom and the father or sometimes it's both the mother and the father stand up at that point and say we do or I do and at that point I say sit down thank you when

I say sit down what I'm saying is sit down and back away that's what that's symbolically what's happening there you've done a great job it's now over God here in Ephesians 5 which is even more remarkable in a patriarchal society for the man to leave his father and mother whereas we think in patriarchal societies the woman now joins the man and becomes part of the man's family that's not what's happening in Ephesians 5 if you are married the opinion of your parents ought not to be more important than your spouses nothing should get more of your ingenuity your time and your energy than your spouse if your spouse does not feel that you are putting him or her first then by definition you are not you're not if you've got a communication problem and one says

[ 30 : 18 ] I don't think we've got a communication problem the other says we do have a communication problem by definition you've got a communication problem and when when this happens your marriage is dying you're in a lot of trouble too many marriage problems arise because couples are yet or have never left They've never gone through the process of leaving and cleaving to each other and just bear in mind here when we hear that we think mummy's boy kind of person the person who's not cut the apron strings yes that's one example of it another example of it is those who have a real detesting of their parents you too have not left and cleaved if you resent your parents you still haven't left them you're still making decisions about your married life to spite them so many spouses allow their bad relationship to their parents to control how they relate to their spouse you must leave it behind leaving and cleaving means that no couple should do anything anything at all simply because my family did it this way if the

Bible says you do it it's unquestioned everything else is open for negotiation one of the things I do when I tell couples or prepare couples for marriage one bit of advice I ask them or one question I ask them what are you doing on the first Christmas after you've been married I don't know I haven't thought about it think about it here's my recommendation set the agenda right from the very beginning to do your own thing on your very first Christmas accept no invitation from extended family and do your own thing for the very first Christmas set the pattern that you are a new family unit and that spouse is not left now the other problem that sinks so many marriages is the over commitment to the next generation to children this one's slightly more harder because they're actually part of your new family unit they're not part of your former family unit they're part of your new family unit and so it's right to consider that parenting is a very high and important calling in life if a marriage cools which it can in the years during when the kids are so needy which means up to probably about 25 nowadays it is it is natural to get your primary need of love and affection to have it met through the child parent relationship rather than the husband wife relationship but when we love our children more than we love our spouse then the entire family unit gets pulled off centre and everyone suffers it's the worst thing you can do for your children it's why so many marriages come to a grinding halt when the kids depart

Ephesians 6 verse 4 says the goal of parenting is to raise them up in the Lord raise them up grow them up the goal of parenting to summarize that the goal of parenting is to get rid of them to have them in order to get rid of them that's the goal I've summarized it that's not the goal in this life that you should have for your spouse the best way to be a great parent is to be a great spouse that is the main thing that our children need from us so the crucial principle here is that your spouse should be or is at least capable of becoming your best friend where they know your heart more than anyone else anyone else it's a relationship of dependability transparency sympathy with a common vision and together it creates a deep deep oneness over time in other words to summarize it if you like the common vision for your marriage is that you're playing dress ups

I need to explain that it's up there my last point preparing for the ultimate friend in Ephesians 5 25 to 27 this is the goal if you like the common vision for marriage is getting each other to their ultimate friend that's the vision that's the goal that is to get your spouse prepared and ready for her wedding day the ultimate wedding day her true lover friend their true love of friend putting Christian friendship at the heart of marriage what it does is it lifts it to a level that no other vision of marriage even comes close to you see the Bible's vision of marriage is to look at your spouse and to get a glimpse!

of the person that God is creating and you fall in love with that that's Christian marriage when Michelangelo was asked how he carved his magnificent David statue out of a lump of marble he's reputed to have said I looked inside the marble and I just took away the bits that were not David that's the vision of marriage right there Jesus died on the cross for our sin to remake us into his image his goal is to perfect his church according to Ephesians 5 his bride!



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