

How to have a Good Marriage

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone and welcome to this talk of how to have a good marriage. Now I don't presume to be an expert in that topic, but that doesn't matter because I'm here to teach the Bible.

And the Bible actually has everything that we need to have healthy, successful marriages. And that's what I hope that you're going to see this morning.

But I first need to tell you how to use the Bible to find out how to have successful marriages. And unfortunately it's not as easy as opening up to the back and looking in the concordance for the word marriage.

And then just reading every verse about marriage and finding some useful tips. That's not how the Bible works. The Bible is not a book of tips on how to live life. Rather, the Bible, if we understand it in its entirety, gives us a new worldview.

It gives us an alternate worldview to what we could discover about this world for ourselves. It reveals to us things about this world and our lives that we wouldn't otherwise know. And if you have this worldview, then you can look at things like marriage and things in your life through that lens and discover how to see those things in a whole new way.

[1 : 26] And that is how I'm hoping to help you see how we can have better marriages as those of us who are married. Now, you might be watching and you're not married.

Hopefully this talk might still be helpful to you because maybe you'll get married in the future. But even if you don't, you might have friends or family members who could make use of this, that you could guide them through their marriages with this biblical lens.

And so I'm going to pray as we look at these things, because we need God to help us, especially when it comes to a topic like this. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you that you have given us your word that helps us to understand this world and our lives in a whole new way.

And so we pray that as we look at this particular topic of marriage, you would guide us, that you would direct us to think about marriage through a biblical lens and help us to see how you want us to see our marriages and our families and our place on earth so that we can live lives more appropriate to who you've made us to be.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so what we're going to do this morning is we're going to look at marriage in four basic concepts.

[2 : 43] And these are essentially the four categories which summarize the whole sweep of the Bible narrative. And they help us, these four categories, to look at the world in a new way.

So the four categories that I want to talk about this morning, you may have heard them before describing other things or summarizing the Bible narrative. It's creation, fall, redemption, and recreation.

Essentially, that summarizes the whole of human history. But if we look at our lives in those four categories, we get to see things that we may not have seen before. Let me go through each of them in turn and you'll see what I mean.

Firstly, creation. Now, the basic biblical presupposition, which is on the very first sentence in the Bible, the very first chapter, the very first page of the Bible, is that we were created.

That we have a creator, God, and that he made us. Now, that basic foundational idea, which underpins the rest of the Bible, also has very important implications for our lives.

[3 : 54] Because if you think about it, if we were created, that means we have a purpose. You can't create something without a purpose. Everything that was created, by definition, has a purpose.

And if something has a purpose that is in the creator's mind for creating it, then there is a right and a wrong way to use it, always. If something has a purpose, that implies ethics.

It implies right and wrong. A basic example, if you take a simple household appliance, like a toaster, there is a right and a wrong way to use a toaster, because it was created for a particular purpose, to toast bread, to make it into toast.

And so the manufacturers of the toaster would have supplied you a manual and a bunch of do's and don'ts. Essentially toaster ethics, if you like. Things that you should do with it and things that you shouldn't.

So your toaster cannot, you can't decide that your toaster is suddenly a sock warmer. If you do, and if you use it for something it wasn't designed for, then it'll spell disaster, at least for your socks, maybe for your kitchen and the rest of your home.

[5 : 03] But you see what I'm saying. If something was created by an intelligent designer, it means it has a purpose. And if something has a purpose, it means always that there is a right and a wrong way to use it.

And so our bodies, our world, the Bible tells us we're created, we're designed for a purpose, therefore there's a right and a wrong way to use them. But here's the thing. It also says that about marriage, that it was designed for a purpose by God.

Let me read to you from Genesis chapter 2. This is before the fall, before the world became like it is today. We're told this.

Right at the beginning of God creating the first man and woman, before the woman was created, God gave Adam responsibility to classify nature, naming the animals.

And that ability to name something was very important. It showed his regency as a human over creation, his responsibility to rule it, classify it, and define it.

[6 : 13] Anyway, it says, Whatever the man called the living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock, to all the birds of the air, and to every wild animal. But for the man, no helper was found corresponding to him.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. Then the Lord God made the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man.

And the man said, This one, at last, is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. This one will be called woman, for she was taken from man. And this is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

Both the man and his wife were naked, and yet they felt no shame. Okay, so this is very important. This word, corresponding, is quite a vital one.

So God, it tells us, created a woman to correspond to a man. Now the original word here literally means someone made different, but to help.

[7 : 23] Someone made opposite in order to assist, to help, to make up for what the man was lacking. And so God designed genders to be corresponding, and those genders were to be bonded in a special relationship called marriage that had rules.

God lays out the pattern of marriage here. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. So there's exclusivity, there's permanence, there's intimacy. All things that God said need to be in a marriage, which are developed, of course, later in Scripture.

But here is the blueprint for a healthy marriage, right here at creation. The point is that God made it. It was God's idea. He invented it, not us. And so He gets to define the right and the wrong way to use it.

We don't get to say, we want our marriage to be this, and these are the rules for our marriage, and this is what is going to help our marriage, and this is what isn't. God gets to do that. And that's very important.

If marriage is created, then it means there's a right and a wrong way to use it. It also means there is a set purpose for marriage. And if we want marriages to work, we need to recognize what that purpose is.

[8 : 33] The traditional marriage service puts it this way. Right at the beginning, maybe these were the lines that the minister said at your marriage.

It says, Okay, so if that's the case, if there's a right and a wrong way to use marriage, if it is part of creation, if it was something that was designed for a purpose, what that means is that we don't get to set the rules.

God has already done that. And therefore, if you want to know how to have a good marriage, you need to look at what God has said about it, which is all based in the Bible. And practically, what that means is if you need marriage counseling, find a Christian marriage counselor.

Read books that look at a biblical view of marriage. The Bible actually has a lot to say about marriage. I don't have time to go into all of the implications of the various parts of the Bible into marriage and its explicit references to marriages and what marriages should look like.

But I want hopefully you to take this idea that marriage was created and designed and then read some Christian books on marriage. There's great Christian resources that are available.

[10 : 22] In fact, we can make some of those resources available in the comments of this video below. But that's the point. The point is if marriage was created, if marriage was designed, then it's something that we can't presume that we're just going to get right without listening to what God has said about it.

There's a lot of advice on how to have good marriages in this world, but I can tell you right now that the best advice for marriage, the best guidance for good marriages is Christian guidance and Christian resources and Christian advice.

So have a look at that. The second concept in the biblical worldview, and this is an essential concept if we're properly going to understand ourselves and why the world is like it is today, is the fall.

Now, the Bible describes the fall of humankind in the third chapter of Genesis, the third chapter of the whole Bible, because to understand the rest of the Bible and what it's about, we need to really grasp the human fall from grace, fall into sin.

And now, the way the Bible describes it is that humans were once in a good world where everything worked properly. Yes, I know it's difficult to imagine, but it's true.

[11 : 39] God made us to flourish, and he made this world and us to work in harmony together and to benefit from it and to enjoy him and his gifts forever.

However, it didn't work out like that because of the fall. And the way that came about is that humans were under God's authority because that was what was needed.

If he is the designer and he gets to set the right and wrong way to use things, he has authority and that authority needs to be submitted to if things are going to work properly.

And the whole point about the fall is that that authority was undermined. It wasn't submitted to. So God actually, in order to represent his authority to humans, he didn't put many rules on them at all.

He didn't make much constraints. All he did to make sure that they continued to live under his authority for their good was to tell them there's one tree in the garden they couldn't eat from. Now, they had hundreds of trees with amazing food.

[12 : 38] It must have been pre-fall. And they just had to not eat from this one tree. But of course they did because they couldn't stand the idea of something being withheld from them.

They couldn't stand the idea of being under the authority of another. That's innate in sinful humans is not to want to submit to another. And they also failed to trust God's word.

That's what led them to want to eat from this tree is because they failed to trust that God is going to make them happy without them having to find new ways or break rules in order to be happy and fulfilled.

In other words, they wanted to be gods themselves. They didn't want a god to rule over them. They wanted to call the shots. They wanted to do things their own way. And that is actually the root cause. That desire called sin.

Desire to break away from God's authority. To do things our own way. To be gods ourselves. That is in fact the cause of not only the problems in this world and wars and poverty and selfishness and greed and all of that but also it's the cause of every problem in a marriage.

[13 : 53] Now one of the keys therefore to preventing marital issues is to let me put it this way own the fact that we're sinners. To own our sinfulness.

Paul Tripp he's a great commentator on marriage Christian teacher and marriage counselor. He's got a famous line which is so helpful. He says the biggest problem in your marriage is you.

And if you just recognize that if you just recognize the biggest problem in your marriage it's not money or sex or whatever it's actually the biggest problem the root problem is you.

Your own sinful heart. And if you recognize that that's going to help you to overcome a lot of issues which come up in marriage. In marriage counseling often people will come to me as a pastor and they'll say essentially not in these words but the subtext is I want you to fix my husband or I want you to fix my wife.

And half of the battle of marriage counseling is to help people to realize no they need to fix themselves first. They need to be fixed. It's not about fixing the other person.

[15 : 00] And it also that comes out in conflict in marriage. If we own our sinfulness what that'll do is that'll help us when we're having a conflict with our spouse to not immediately by default go I've got to show the other person how they're wrong.

Actually because that's the normal default right? Okay we're in an argument let me do everything I can and focus on how I can show the other person they're in the wrong. But if we own our sinfulness if we recognize that sin is our default inside our hearts then what we'll do is say actually I might be in the wrong let me first see if there's any way that I was in the wrong hand.

I mean how many married couples know that so much fighting and conflict could have been avoided if they had just started by saying maybe maybe this is my fault maybe I should look at that before I look at how it's the other person's fault.

The third concept in the Christian worldview is redemption. So in the story of the Bible you've got creation God's good intents for humanity then you've got the fall humanity wanting to step out of God's authority and then inadvertently also stepping out of his blessing stepping out of the blessing of life and ongoing life that's why we die because we've been we've stepped out of God's authority we've entered into trying to be our own gods and trying to make our own life good which we never succeed at anyway.

But then that's not where the Bible story is because God has a plan he's actually always had a plan which he hints at even right at the beginning to redeem us to undo this curse that we're under to stepping outside of God's authority and to come back into a place of right relationship with God and being under his blessing again.

[16 : 54] And that is of course the story of the gospel and how Jesus Christ comes and fulfills all of the things that the prophets have been looking forward to in the Old Testament throughout Israel's history that God is going to one day through this people Israel send a Messiah send a Savior to come and to bring God's people back into right relationship with him and Jesus did that of course by dying on the cross when he uniquely able to take the sins of others died on the cross for the sins of his people all who submit to him and trust in him.

So we can even though we're sinners have that sin undone the results of that sin taken away by him on the cross and come back into right relationship with God which also leads to restored relationships with each other.

And so the thing is in summary what was necessary for us to be redeemed as human beings was two things sacrificial love on the part of God Jesus Christ to come and give his life sacrificially to save us but also a willing submission.

That is our response to what Jesus has done for us is to come to him willingly and submit ourselves again our lives under his authority rather than our own. That's the pattern God's plan of salvation for human beings that involves sacrificial love and willing submission.

But now here's the thing God's plan for redeeming humans humanity is also God's plan for redeeming marriage. we see this in Ephesians chapter 5 listen to what the Apostle Paul writes as he now applies the gospel lens to marriage he writes this wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church he is the savior of the body now as the church submits to Christ so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy cleansing her with the washing of water by the word he did this to present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or anything like that but holy and blameless in the same way husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies he who loves his wife loves himself for no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it just as Christ does for the church since we are members of his body for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh this is a mystery and it's profound but I'm talking about Christ and the church to sum up each one of you is to love his wife as himself and the wife is to respect her husband and so what this is saying is that just as God has planned to redeem broken people through the gospel through sacrificial love and willing submission so that is the pattern to redeem broken marriages no marriage is too broken too far gone you might think it is but it's not too far gone to be redeemed through the power of the gospel through the power of sacrificial love and willing submission and so what the apostle is teaching is if we pattern our marriages on the gospel pattern and what the gospel inspires that's why by the way

[20 : 29] Paul writes this to Christian married couples because only Christians really have this gospel ability in them because they've been saved through Jesus' willing sacrifice to then be able to love each other in that way and so essentially the secret that Paul is saying for a redeemed marriage a gospel redeemed marriage is to pattern our marriages after the gospel which means to bring into our marriages sacrificial love and willing submission so let me talk about those two things which are the gospel implications for a redeemed marriage submission and sacrifice now both of them are really hard submission especially of women to men is really unpopular but I want to talk about that and why it's still good firstly we need to understand what submission actually is submission is not an enslavement submission is not an oppression of course it can be and it has been in the past abused and distorted to be oppressive but actually submission in the Bible is a willing placing of oneself under the authority of in trust that that person has your best interests at heart and we actually do this every day we submit to authorities placed over us we submit to traffic rules because we know they're for our good we submit to the pilot of a plane that we're flying as a passenger in because we know that he's an authority and submission to him is going to give us a safe journey well in the same way

God is saying there is a structure designed in marriage which the husband and the wife have different roles and they can't both lead it's like dancing I mean if you if you both if you're dancing just imagine ballroom dancing with both partners trying to take the lead that's never going to work for dancing to work and for it to be a beautiful thing there needs to be different roles one needs to lead and one needs to follow God says the same applies for marriage of course what that means is that husbands need to learn how to lead properly which they often don't know how to do but that's another topic completely maybe we'll do a different talk on that but the point is you will be able to do these things and wives will be able to willingly submit to their husbands if they believe that is God's pattern and it is for the good of their marriage but here's the next thing the instruction to husbands is even more difficult than the instruction to wives because the instruction to husbands is willing sacrifice to see their wives bodies as their own bodies and to put their wives needs and wants ahead of their own willing sacrifice to sacrifice what we want for what our spouse wants now many men would say

I'm willing to sacrifice my wife I would stop a bullet for her I'm willing to give my life for my spouse for my wife and they might well be genuine but I wonder how many of those men would also be willing to stop watching the rugby to spend time with their wife or to wash the dishes after she's had a really tough day the point that I'm making is that sacrificial love isn't only at the end of your life when you die for your wife but it's actually every day of your life when you make those little sacrifices daily those little giving over of what you want to give what your wife wants now if the wife knows that the husband is doing that loving her sacrificially and he shows that to her daily as a pattern then it'll be really easy for her to submit to him and for her to respect his role and position as the leader of the family and that is when a marriage flies now one last thing to say on that is that these biblical requirements for a gospel shaped marriage are

I would say impossible if you have not been affected by the gospel yourself if you have not come to submit to Christ and to trust in his sacrificial act for you then I would say it's pretty much impossible to be able to have the power to do these things in your marriage and that's why Paul writes these instructions to Christians but I would say even if you're not a Christian that they are essential for you to have a successful marriage but what's foundational for that to work is for you to come and understand what Jesus has done for you and to trust in that and to submit to him first then the fourth and final stage in the biblical world view is recreation and that is a stage that we haven't yet reached in our history it's still to come in the future the bible makes that quite clear that God's plan for this world isn't just to leave us in this state but to bring us to a new creation and to bring us resurrection in new bodies that don't suffer and die the results of sin and curse it's an undoing of the curse and that is really what the whole bible story is about however the reason we're not there yet is because we need our sins to be dealt with we need to be in right relationship with God in order to be in that new creation and that is why we live in an age where the gospel is being proclaimed and where Jesus is being proclaimed and where people need to come and realize what Jesus has done for them so that they can be redeemed so their lives their marriages the other aspects of their lives can be redeemed and they can be prepared for a new creation to come and be in right relationship with God before Jesus comes back which he's going to do and so that's that's still a future stage and understanding that understanding that that's where we're headed where this world is headed that there's an end point that it's not just going to cycle like this forever that God's actually got a plan an end point for this current age and a new age to come when we understand the world in that light then it puts a new spin on our marriages and what they're for in this age especially given that

Jesus says that there will be no marriage in the new creation now I know that's for many people quite shocking because most of the happiness they receive in this life is from their marriages and so they go I don't want to not have a marriage I don't want to not be married to my spouse in the new creation and it does sound negative but actually it's positive if you think about it because what it means is that everything that God has wanted to give you through your marriage you will now receive from him directly and the purposes for marriage which I stated earlier the purposes of procreation and avoiding sin and companionship and help in this broken world well they won't actually we won't need those things anymore because we will be in right relationship with God in a restored creation and we will have perfect relationships with everyone and so while that does sound negative it actually points to something positive it points to the ultimate marriage between Christ and his people where they will receive straight from God all the blessings that we used to receive in small ways from marriage you see the point that the Bible makes is that marriage that God has given us as a great gift in this life is only ever meant to point to something bigger and better in our relationship with him and what that also means is that marriage is not the ultimate place to look for fulfillment and happiness and that is also the problem in many marriages is that people are looking to their marriage to give them ultimate fulfillment which it was never designed to give they're looking to their marriage relationships to give them what only God can give them a sense of identity and fulfillment and satisfaction and true joy however we live in a world where marriage is sadly depicted as the ultimate aim and the ultimate way to be happy and you look at

[28 : 59] Hollywood movies and that's what they depict often marriage to be this great achievement the end point and the climax of a good life is to be married and to get all the joy of marriage and finally you'll feel settled and fulfilled and happy well that's not the case marriage is never meant to give us ultimate fulfillment and if we look to it to do that it'll put too much pressure on our marriages and they'll break very often I've had people in my office as a pastor say to me you know I want to get divorced because my husband's just not making me happy anymore and I've got one chance for happiness in this life and I want to be happy now that is sadly firstly a sinful selfish desire which is going to hurt others you know because because that's what sin does it makes us put our own wants ahead of everyone else's but also what that is doing it's a false assumption that we will find ultimate happiness in this life and the thing is when many people do that and they get divorced and they run off of someone else looking for ultimate happiness it never works give me an example write to me tell me an example of where you've committed adultery and you found the ultimate happiness you were looking for it doesn't work it never does because marriage and relationships in this life can't give us the ultimate happiness that God has made us to find only in Him and so to expect our marriages to do what they were never designed to do is to put too much pressure on them and put them at risk of snapping under pressure and so in closing

I guess what I want to say is if you want to start having a marriage that works well you need to look at your marriage through this biblical lens that the Bible gives us now you can't do it from just one talk I hope that this is going to inspire you to look into the Bible more to look up Christian resources on marriage and to discover if you're not a Christian yet what Jesus has done for us read one of the Gospels in the Bible Matthew, Mark, Luke or John those are summaries of the life of Jesus and what he's come to this earth to do to redeem us from our sin and so we need to start seeing marriage in light of creation in light of the fall the fact that we are sinners that we've got to own when we come to our marriages realize that your biggest problem in your marriage is you thirdly we've got to realize that God has done everything to redeem us and our marriages through sacrificial love and willing submission and fourthly we've got to realize that marriage marriage is not the ultimate goal in this life that there is something much greater to come in a new restored creation and the best marriage can do is give us glimpses into what our relationship with God will look like in the world to come as his people and so let's pray and ask for him to help us to see our lives and our marriages through this biblical lens let's pray

Lord we do thank you that you've given us revelation we could never get from ourselves about this life and about where we've come from and where we're going help us Lord to see our lives and our marriages in light of this help us to live out the truths of the gospel Lord I pray for anybody watching here who is not yet a Christian that you would just help them to see that the Bible has in it everything they need to know about life and eternity and that you would lead them to to read the Bible and to discover what Jesus has done for them and to trust in him and to enter into his people so that they would be restored redeemed and that their marriages and that all of our marriages Lord would be redeemed through the power of what Jesus has done for us and his spirit that he sent us to live out gospel lives in anticipation of a world that comes which you've created us and saved us for Amen