

God's View of Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from Genesis 1 and Matthew 19. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin of your own Bible. Starting in verses Genesis 1, 26, we read, Then God said, Let us make men in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created men in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. And God blessed them.

And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Then in Matthew 19, 3, we read, And Pharisees came up to him and test him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

[1 : 2 7] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Whatever God has joined together, let not men separate. This is the word of God.

Thank you, Nikki. Well, everybody, it is wonderful to be back with you. It's great to see a couple of faces we haven't seen for a while. And if you are new to Watermark, my name is Kevin, one of the leaders here.

It's really great to have you with us this morning. Will you join me? Let's pray together as we dive into this. So let's pray. Father, as we come to your word this morning, like we do every week, we come to your word because we want to hear from you.

We want to hear the life-giving word of the living God speaking to our souls. Father, we don't come to church just to hear some interesting advice or some humanistic wisdom. God, we've come to the ancient of days, God, the one who has existed from eternity and whose ways are perfect, who, as we sang about earlier, whose law is perfect, who revives our souls.

And so this morning as we come to your word, we do pray that you will revive our souls. We pray, God, that as we look at this subject of marriage and relationships, that you will revive our marriages.

[2 : 4 3] God, we come this morning not because we're perfect or we have it together. It's so tempting to come to church with a brave face and to act like we have it together. God, the reality is all of us need your grace.

And so this morning come and flood us with your grace. Flood us with your mercy. God, for those of us that carry shame, flood us with your grace, we pray this morning. God, won't you call us back to yourself?

Help us to fix our eyes on you, the living God. God, this morning as we think about the subject of marriage and relationships and family, we bring our city before you.

This wonderful city of Hong Kong that we love so much and yet which carries so much pain in the area of family and homes. God, won't you come and heal our city?

Won't you come and heal the families in our city? Won't you come and heal and restore relationships? God, we pray. God, may your church and followers of Jesus be a light in this city and be an agent of hope and healing in this world, we pray.

[3 : 42] And so come and start off by doing a work in our own hearts, Lord. Come and revive us. Come and heal us, Lord God, and help us and send us out to be agents of grace in this city.

We pray this, Christ, in your wonderful and your very faithful name. Amen. Amen. When I was about nine or ten years old, somewhere around there, my family was on holiday at my grandparents' house, which is on the southern coast of South Africa, in a town called Port Elizabeth.

And it was Christmas Day, and normally it's summertime in the southern hemisphere of Christmas, but this day was miserable. It was cold and windy and wet and rainy, and it wasn't a great day.

The afternoon, it cleared up a little bit, but my family decided to go to the beach and fly some kites. And so I went down to the beach to fly the kites, but because it was such a miserable day, there was no one else on the beach.

We were the only family there. But after a while, I got bored with flying kites, and so I said to my dad, I'm going to go swim in the sea. And so my dad said, just be careful, but okay, I'm watching you.

[4 : 51] And because it was such a miserable day, the waves were a bit more rough than usual, and the lifeguards had decided, listen, there's no one swimming, we can pack up and go home. And so I'm in the sea, I'm swimming a little bit, but what I didn't realize was there's a rip current that was pulling me out.

And by the time I realized this, I was too far gone, and I wasn't strong enough to swim back to shore. Fortunately, my dad was on the shore and could see what was happening.

And so he ran up to the car park, and he found the last lifeguard was getting in his car on his way home. And my dad got his attention, and the guy ran down to the beach, and suffice to say, he did his job fairly well, right?

I'm still standing here today. Now, I tell you that story because we're starting a series today called Gender, Sex, Relationships, and God.

And we're going to be looking over the next five or six weeks at these big topics and areas of life. And the reason why we're doing this is because as citizens in our city in which we live, we live in a culture which is changing so quickly and so ferociously in a way that as we live our lives, we don't realize some of the currents that we're swimming in.

[6 : 15] I don't think we do it in Hong Kong, at least I haven't seen it yet, but in many other countries around the world, the lifeguards will put flags up in the sand, and they'll tell you, listen, swim between these flags, right?

If you swim outside of these flags, there are currents out there, and you can find yourself in danger in a difficult water. But if you stay within these flagpoles, that's a safe area to swim.

And in some ways, what we want to do in this series is we want to raise the flag again and say, what does God have to say about these really important areas of life so that we don't find ourselves being swept away by the currents of our culture and we find ourselves in difficult waters?

Okay? Sorry. Now, just, by the way, we have this book called The Meaning of Marriage. There's a bunch of them here and there's some outside. This morning, we're going to be talking about marriage.

And next week, we're going to talk about sex. The week after that, we're going to talk about cohabitation, living together outside of marriage. The week after that, we're going to talk about transgender and gender issues.

[7 : 21] And then the week after that, we're going to talk about singleness. Okay? So that's where we're going. This is one of the best books you could ever read on marriage. It's by Tim and Kathy Keller from New York City.

I'll encourage you to get it and read it if you haven't. It's \$100. There's a bunch of copies here or outside. If you haven't, just grab a copy, drop \$100 in the box.

I want to encourage you to read that book. Okay. So let's think about marriage. As society has become more secularistic in our worldview and our ideology and our thinking, this has changed many things.

And one of the impact, one of the areas it's impacted is the way we view relationships and marriage. And so what is it that our worldview, our culture, how do we think about marriage today?

Well, one of the things that's happened is we think of marriage and relationships as personal gratification. It's about me and what I can get out of it. We approach relationships to the viewpoint of how is this relationship going to add or benefit my life?

[8 : 29] How will this complete me? Many people approach marriage thinking this will fill the void in my heart. This will complete me. And so we approach it from a worldview of personal gratification.

We also tend to think of it, our culture, thinks of marriage and relationships in very sentimental values or sentimental terms. So when I first started officiating weddings as a pastor many years ago, I would allow couples to write their own vows.

Claire and I wrote our own vows and I thought, this is a good idea. But I quickly changed my mind. And the reason is because couples would write their vows but their vows would be more of a description of how you make me feel rather than a commitment or vow of love, right?

So you get people standing up and saying things like, you are the salmon on my sushi roll, you are the Nutella on my bagel, you know. And so I quickly abandoned that idea and said, no, no, I'm going to give you a proper vow to say.

You say, for better or for worse, richer or poorer, that's a proper vow, right? And so some of you, I know, are getting married soon. Z and Helen and Justin and Annabelle, just a warning, if you want to be involved in your wedding, there's not going to be any Nutella on your bagel in the vows, okay?

[9 : 45] But we tend to think of marriage and love in very sentimental terms, right? There's this euphoric kind of feeling of sentimentality. We also tend to think of a good marriage or relationship is based on compatibility.

So two people come together and they've got similar backgrounds, similar culture, they are emotionally or financially, even sexually compatible, and if you can work out how compatible you are, you have the same kind of socioeconomic class, then we feel like, okay, this is going to be a good marriage, this is going to work.

And so that's kind of the sentimental side. On the other side, we can think of relationships very pragmatically. And so sometimes people approach relationships with a viewpoint of this is a human partnership, right?

And so we've both got a contribution to bring, you've got a contribution, I've got a contribution. If we come together, this partnership can work well and together the sum of our parts will be something better than we will individually.

And so one article in the Harvard Journal for Law and Public Policy entitled, What is Marriage? summarized our kind of modern view like this. It says, we see marriage as the union of any two people who commit to romantically love and care for each other and to share the burdens and the benefits of domestic life.

[11 : 08] Okay, that really sums it up. Two people who commit to romantically love and care for each other and share the burdens and the benefits of domestic life. It's essentially a union of hearts and minds and hands enhanced by whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable.

And so what's happened is as we've become more secularistic and more in our worldview and our thinking, as we've removed God from the center of our equation, what's happened is that we find two major shifts have taken place in the way that we think about relationships and marriage.

And this is summed up so brilliantly in a book called Divine Sex by Jonathan Grant and James Smith. And what they say is this, that essentially as we've removed God from the center of our worldview, we've necessarily become more self-focused.

So we define relationships and particularly marriage in terms of myself and how does this benefit me. And secondly, we necessarily deify or idolize our partners.

So we look to our partners and ask them to satisfy or do something for us that historically we realized only God could do. Listen to how they describe it. Now it's quite a long quote so you're going to need to bear with me but I think this sums it up really well.

[12 : 22] They say this, because of our cultures move away from a belief in God as the source of reality, we've come to place the full weight of our identity and our hopes on the material here in our existence.

Rather than becoming free and expansive and generous, our relationships have become narrow and constrained, having very little purpose beyond themselves. Okay, that's a very important point.

This exclusive focus has seismically destabilized our relationships in two ways. One, the burden they bear becomes overwhelming because of the expectation that all of our needs, psychological, emotional, material, sexual needs, will be met by one remarkable soulmate.

And two, the very bond that we crave is now undermined by the inwardly focused nature of our desire for the authentic self. We do not so much give ourselves to a relationship as expect the relationship to give itself to us.

Our most intimate relationships are looked to by each partner as a primary source of happiness and self-fulfillment or actualization. Am I getting what I need from this relationship?

[13 : 35] Does it make me happy? Do the benefits outweigh the costs? Okay? So do you see what they're saying there? As we've removed God from the center of the equation, fundamentally these two things have happened.

We've become inward focused and focused on ourselves and we've put this undue burden and pressure on the other partner to satisfy us and to give us what historically only God could give us.

And what they so brilliantly explain is that when we remove God from the equation, actually we form this kind of bubble, you know, like market bubbles, right? When there's a lot of hype but there's no substance to underpin that hype.

In the same way, the worldview that's removed God from the center of the equation actually falls in on itself. It cannot sustain the hype and the pressure that we put upon it. Augustine famously said it like this, in turning away from God, we have intrinsically turned in on ourselves.

But as we all know that as we do that, the self-focus and self-absorption is the very death of any relationship because the relationship cannot handle the pressure that we put on it.

[14 : 44] And so the consequences of this are devastating. Someone put it like this, to be lonely is difficult, to be married and lonely is utterly devastating. And there are tens of thousands, millions of people around the world that are married and utterly lonely because they went into marriage thinking, this person is going to fool me and complete me and their marriage is not able to live up to the hype that we place on it.

We've traded God's profound vision for marriage for cheap counterfeits and we're left wondering why it doesn't last, why it doesn't satisfy. Now in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 6, there's this amazing verse.

I know we've spoken about it quite a lot. Jeremiah says this, stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls.

Ask for the ancient paths. And so over and against the secular and exhausting view of relationships and marriage and life and sexuality, God invites us to come back to the ancient paths, to the ways of the ancient of days and to find what he has to say which will both revitalize but also satisfies.

Okay? And so that's what we want to do a little bit this morning. Now, our modern secular culture isn't the first culture to try and reframe and redefine marriage and relationships.

[16 : 08] In the passage that Nikki read to us earlier, Matthew 19, some religious leaders come to Jesus and they want to do the same. They're trying to ask Jesus what is a legitimate marriage and therefore what does legitimate divorce look like?

And they're trying to get a handle and grasp on what does marriage really look like. And what Jesus does is he goes back to Genesis 1 and 2, back to the very origins of God's design for marriage and he answers them that way.

And so let's look at this passage again. I'm going to read just Matthew 19 to us again and then we're going to see what Jesus says. So let's read it. Pharisees come to Jesus and they test him saying, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?

Jesus answers and says, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? And he said, therefore man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

So they're no longer two but one. What God has joined together, let not man separate. Now in this passage, I want us just to see three things and there are so many things we could say about marriage.

[17 : 14] So we're going to hardly even scratch the surface. But I want us to think about God's plan for marriage, God's purpose for marriage and God's pattern. Okay, I'm sorry there are three Ps. I know that's very irritating but it just worked today.

Okay, God's plan, God's purpose, God's pattern. Okay, so let's dive in. Firstly, God's plan or God's design for marriage. Let's see what Jesus says God built into marriage. There's a couple of things here but the first thing is this.

Rather than a partnership, God designed marriage as a one flesh union. Look at verse four with me. Jesus quotes Genesis, says, Therefore man will leave his father and mother and hold fast his wife and the two will become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one flesh. I have a friend called Davi or David Lowe. In South Africa we call him Davi but the rest of the world we call him David.

He pastors a church in New York City. And when he was engaged to his fiancée, I remember him talking to me and saying, he used to think of marriage as like a football field. And you both start on either end, you know, the goal line and you kind of come together and you meet in the halfway line and you both bring 50-50 to the table and you meet in the halfway line and you agree to do this life together.

[18 : 30] But 50-50 is the language of partnership, not the language of one flesh union. God's design is not that we come into marriage saying, listen, you bring your contribution, I'll bring my contribution and together one plus one will equal two.

We'll form this human partnership. Rather than this partnership, the language of the scriptures is a language of a union, of the two becoming one. And when the two become one, there's something different, there's a new entity that's formed, it's more than just the substance of the sum of the parts.

It's kind of like, this is a bad analogy, but it's kind of like, think of hydrogen and oxygen coming together. Two hydrogen, one oxygen. It's not just the sum of two hydrogen, one oxygen.

There's some kind of new substance that's formed. It's not just the gas, there's a new water, there's a water that's formed. When the two come together in marriage, God's ideals, there's not just this partnership of you bring your contribution, I'll bring mine.

There's something altogether new and distinctive about the oneness, the one flesh union. I don't know if you remember the traditional, the last line of traditional vows. It goes something like this, with all that I have and with all that I am, I give myself to you.

[19 : 43] Okay, does that sound familiar? Okay, that's much better than salmon and sushi, right? With all that I am and all that I have, I give myself to you. Now imagine saying that in a business partnership, right?

Those of you that are involved in M&As, imagine writing that into the agreement, right? I just want you to know, with all that I have and all that I am, all that I have, I give myself to you, right? Your business partner is going to think they've hit the jackpot.

They're going to say, just, sorry, what's the password to your personal bank accounts and that holiday home in Seychelles? I'll take that as well. That's covenant, that's union, right?

It's not just, listen, this is what I'll bring, this is what you bring, let's see if we can make this work. There's something altogether different. Now, practically, what does that mean? It means one of the most important things for those of us that are married is to fight for the oneness in our marriage, to fight for the oneness and the unity.

Remember what we said last week, you can win the battle but lose the war, right? You can win the argument and lose the relationship. One of the things that Claire and I early on in our marriage worked out was that when we have a disagreement and we do have disagreements, I know we always look like we're perfectly in love with church on Sundays, but we do have disagreements.

[20 : 56] We worked out that when that happens, we've got to quickly remind ourselves, hey, we're on the same team here. We're in this together. And so you are not the enemy, I'm not the enemy, the issue that's come between us is the enemy, right?

I'm not here to attack you, you don't attack me. Let's attack what's coming between us. Yes, I'm being selfish, yes, I'm being a dork, okay, let's attack that but let's not attack one another.

We're in this together, we're on the same team, even in the midst of an argument. And so practically, fight for the oneness in your marriage. The second thing it means is this, do whatever it takes to build and possibly rebuild the bond of trust.

Every management book in the world will tell you, right, Jim Collins and Patrick Lencioni, these guys will tell you that trust in a leadership team, in a business, is the most critical thing. If you don't have trust, you're in deep trouble.

Within a marriage, do whatever you can to build and rebuild the bond of trust because when the trust is broken, that oneness is so difficult. Okay, so that's the first part of God's design.

[21 : 59] Notice something else here. God's design is that it's a divine union, not a human union. Look at what he says here in verse six. They're no longer two but one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man separate.

Marriage is not just the coming together of two humans. There's something of God's divine, supernatural, divine work, his handiwork that brings them together.

I don't know how many of you are artists or creatives, okay? I know most of us here are lawyers or finance people but let's imagine some of us are artists. You try your hand at sketching or drawing and you don't like what you do, right?

So what do you do? You scrunch it up and you throw it away and you try again. Okay, well, you're allowed to do that. It's your work. But try doing that to someone else's work, right? You're in an art class and you don't like the person's art next to you and so you scrunch it up and you throw it away.

It's not going to go down very well, right? Marriage is not a human institution. God says it's his handiwork. It's his creative genius.

[23 : 03] It's he who's designed it and it's he who unites two people together. What God has joined together, let not man separate. Now, what that means is the point here is that partly divorce is really serious.

It defaces God's artwork, God's creative handiwork. But the other point here is that marriage is not just a human partnership. It's a divine union. God is its architect and designer, its creator, but also the one that unites us together.

And that means that in order for marriages to flourish, we need to not just do it according to God's instructions and his recipe, we actually need to invite God into the center of our marriages.

Another way of saying that is in every marriage, there's not just a horizontal component between me and Claire. There's a vertical component as well. God wants us to invite himself into the center of our marriages.

Now, practically speaking, what does that mean? For those of us that are married or those of you that are dating, when was the last time you prayed with your spouse or your boyfriend and your girlfriend?

[24 : 07] And not just prayed for the meal at dinner time or prayed when there's a crisis. When was the last time we prayed to you and invited God into our relationship? When Claire and I were dating, we were actually better at this dating than we are when we married.

But just say, God, come and have your way in our marriage. God, this week, you know the challenges that we're going to face. Come and have your way. God, we want to surrender to you. We want you to be at the very center, inviting God into the center of our relationships.

So part of God's design is it's this divine union of two becoming one. But there's something else in God's design here and that is that we see from these verses that for those who are married, this becomes the most significant of human relationships.

Look at what Jesus says here. Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? And he said, therefore, man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

Now, if you grew up in the Western world, America or Europe, or if that's your cultural background, this is not even shocking, right? This is like obvious.

[25 : 12] Why? Because as Westerners, myself included, we are so individualistic, okay? We don't have a good understanding of the family unit and the family tie. But for those of us that are Asian by culture or grew up in Asia, you guys are infinitely better at family relationships than Westerners, right?

You know what it means to honor your parents and you can teach us Westerners a whole lot. Can I be honest? I didn't really understand that until I moved to Asia, just how individualistic I was.

I've learned so much from my Hong Kong brothers and sisters, right? But at the same time, for us who are Asian culture and ethnicity, this can be challenging because notice what Jesus says here.

Jesus says something shocking. He says, the marriage bond is thicker than blood. Okay? And that can be very challenging for us here in Hong Kong.

Now that obviously doesn't mean that we dishonor our parents, we don't care about our parents, or our children aren't important to us. Jesus is not saying that. He's not saying it's the only relationship. But he says there's something so profoundly significant that it becomes the most significant and important of your relationships.

[26 : 24] Okay? Now what does that mean? Well, one of the things that it means, and all psychology students will tell us this, that one of the things it means is that for those of us that are married and have kids, the very best thing that we can do for our children is to have a healthy marriage.

And all psychology students will tell us this, that as long as people living in Asia, we put so much emphasis on our kids that the tendency is to sometimes neglect our marriages to serve our kids.

But Jesus actually tells us that the very best thing we can do for our kids, the most secure thing we can do for them is to have a healthy marriage. Okay? But there's many ways that we cannot leave our parents.

Tim Keller, I heard him say this many years ago and it's always impacted me. He said this, some people are so angry, so bitter with their parents that they promise to never be like them, to do everything they can to be different from them.

But don't you see that you're still tied to them? They're still controlling you. You actually haven't left them. And his point is that there's many ways to not leave our parents' home and for our parents to still have a controlling relationship over us, even if it's our anger and our bitterness towards them.

[27 : 41] Okay? So all of that is God's design, God's plan for marriage is this divine, one flesh, union with God at the center of our marriages.

Okay? Does that make sense? Okay. Great. Thank you. Secondly, God's purpose for marriage. God's purpose for marriage. Now, when the Pharisees come to Jesus and they ask him about marriage and divorce, they're asking him a legal question.

They're saying to him, based on the law that God gave to Moses, what is the right thing to do? Okay? And when Jesus answers them, Jesus doesn't go back to the law of Moses.

He goes back prior to that to Genesis 1 and 2. He goes back to God's original design and purpose for marriage. And in Genesis 1 and 2, we see God's intention and purpose for marriage.

Now, again, there's lots of things here, but I want to focus on just one of them. In Genesis 1, Nikki read it for us earlier, we see that the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, say amongst themselves, let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness.

[28 : 45] So God created man in his image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And he said to them, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it.

And then in chapter 2, we see the same thing, but from a slightly different perspective. God speaks to Adam and he says, Adam, I've made you to care and cultivate the world, to steward my creation, to keep it and look after it, to see it flourish, okay?

But Adam is alone. He doesn't, he needs a helpmate. He needs someone to come alongside him in his calling as a human being. And so God brings Eve, his spouse, to come and help him fulfill his calling.

Now, Eve wasn't just a companion because Adam was lonely and needed friends, right? Or he needed a sexual partner. God brought Eve into his life to help Adam fulfill his calling as a human being.

God gives Adam a commissioning to nurture the world, to establish it, to preserve God's shalom in the world, to steward God's agenda, to build the kingdom of God on earth.

[29 : 56] But Adam can't do it on his own without his spouse. He needs Eve to come alongside him. One commentator said it like this, marriage is meant to strengthen and complement God's call on our lives.

Apart from this understanding, we'll reduce marriage to something that merely fulfills my needs, which ironically is one way to destroy any relationship, including marriage.

Now, of course, this is not saying that if you're not married, you're not fully human, right? Some of the very best people in the world have not been married. Think of Jesus Christ. Think of the Apostle Paul.

In our own day, think of John Stott and tons of others, right? So marriage doesn't complete you. Like, if you're single, you're not fully human. But what this is saying is that for those of us that are married, marriage is meant to be a divine union that empowers us to live out our calling as commissioned agents to bring heaven to earth, to care for and cultivate God's will, to bring heaven to earth, to establish shalom and to advance God's kingdom in the world.

In other words, marriage is not just about your happiness. Now, you are meant to be happily married, okay? So just, sometimes as Christians, have you ever heard Christians say, marriage is not about happiness, it's about holiness?

[31 : 14] Have you ever heard that? Okay? And that's true. Marriage is this agent where God sanctifies us and He purifies us and He makes us more like Jesus and He refines us. That's true. Okay?

It's about our holiness. It's also about happiness. Okay? You are allowed to enjoy your marriage. You don't need to just think like, okay, this is God's sanctifying process, I'll just get through it. Okay?

You actually, you should be friends. You should laugh as well. But it's not just about happiness. It's not just about holiness. It's also about mission. It's about God's calling to make the world a better place.

And your marriage, your union, is God's calling on your life to sanctify the world and to make the world a better place. And so part of this happens through having children and bringing them up in God's ways to honor Him and know Him.

Parenting is not just about having children and getting them good education, going to university and then getting a good job. We should shape our children to be agents of salt and life in the world.

[32 : 15] We teach our children the gospel. We help them to love and trust Jesus so that our children become people that bring shalom and heaven to earth. So marriage, children is part of the way of doing that.

But the other way we do that is through serving together as married couples, seeing your marriage as a calling, not just to build your kingdom but to build Christ's kingdom. In the book of Acts we see this amazing juxtaposition of these two couples.

The one is in Acts chapter 5. There's this couple called Ananias and Sapphira. Do you remember what happens to them? They actually team really well together. They're actually a pretty good team.

The problem is that they team together for evil, right? So they come and collude and they say, listen, I've got this plan. If we do this and this and this we can pretend that we're more godly than we are.

We will lie to the apostles. We will lie to the church. We will lie to God and then we can sort ourselves up and promote ourselves. And so they team well together but actually for their own self-centered agenda and do you know what happens?

[33 : 14] They end up dead. And a few chapters later in Acts we see this other couple called Priscilla and Aquila. And they team together beautifully. They open up their homes in three different cities in the world.

In Athens and Ephesus and I think it's in Antioch we see them opening up their homes inviting people and they teach them the gospel. They share together. At one point the wife is teaching and then the husband is teaching.

They actually team together beautifully as establish the kingdom of God and the church in Acts advances because of this couple. Here you get two couples Ananias and Sapphira Priscilla and Aquila one for their own agenda one for the kingdom of God.

And friends my prayer is that for our church and actually if I can just I know you won't want me to do this but I was thinking about this this week and I think Franklin and Teresa I think you're a great example of this of Priscilla and Aquila opening up your homes in all these cities of the world Beijing and LA and Hong Kong and serving together and teaming together beautifully.

And maybe that we see our marriages like that as well. So this is God's purpose there's lots of other things to be said but one of them is that our marriages is not just happiness it's not just holiness it's mission to see the kingdom of God come to earth.

[34 : 29] Then there's another purpose for our marriage and this stands in direct contrast with the consumeristic view of our modern culture and that is that marriage is one way to know and experience grace and I've called this actually the pattern for marriage.

Many years ago when soon after Claire and I got engaged or married there were some very good friends of ours who were looking to get engaged and I remember the guy saying or telling me the story retrospectively but he wanted to propose to his girlfriend but he had become a Christian kind of a little bit later in life at university and there's a whole lot of history in his life and he thought before I get into marriage I've got to tell my girlfriend what she's getting into right if we're going to be a one flesh union I don't want her finding out later all this stuff and so he summons up all this courage and he said to her listen I want to tell you some of my life story and some of the mess and the pain involved and so they have this discussion one night and he says listen this is where God has taken me this is what's happened this is where I've had to repent so I have to bring God into my life and I want you to know some of my stories that if we get married you know the best and the worst of me and he said it was the scariest night of his life because he wanted to marry her but he also didn't know what is she going to think is she going to say listen you're too damaged you're too broken

I don't want to marry you anymore and so he tells her everything and she says listen I need some time to process this and so they go home to their own respective homes and he says he doesn't sleep that night right it's like he's just thinking over his mind is she still going to want to marry me and the next day they come together and she's written him a letter and he opens up the letter and this is what she says something to this effect she says I choose to love you the way that Christ has loved me with all my failings and all my shortcomings Christ's love has washed over me in such a way that he's not only forgiven me but he's also changing me and Christ's love is busy sanctifying me and redeeming me and as Christ's love has washed over me he's making me the kind of person that can love others and as I love you that way and you love me as we work towards marriage with that kind of love God's going to heal us and restore us and going to make us the kind of people that can love each other selflessly and love this broken world do you see what she's doing there she's directly applying the gospel of

God's grace to this relationship and saying the foundation of this relationship has got to be the love that we see in the gospel and that's what the New Testament says again and again and again it says that Christian marriage is built on patterned on God's profound love for us in the gospel that Christian marriage is both meant to pattern to picture to others but also to picture ourselves the grace of God in the gospel that's what Paul says to married couples in Ephesians 5 he says husbands love your wives the way that Christ loved the church we took communion earlier and Dan led us so well that Jesus on the night before he was betrayed he knew what was going to happen Jesus was going to have his body nailed to the cross Jesus was going to have his body broken week in and week out we take communion to remind us of Christ's unbelievable day by day mercy and grace for us and Jesus says husbands love your wives the same way and Jesus says wives as you relate to husbands let it be the same let the gospel the unconditional sacrificial unmerited grace of

God that Christ has for us let that be the pattern and the picture of our relationships as well Christian marriage is meant to reveal the gospel and God's grace to ourselves and also to those that are watching those outside as they see the day by day mercies of God they see unconditional sacrificial unmerited the love that Christ has for us on our worst days and on our best days when the world sees that it will show us a picture of grace you know the Bible says that the Bible starts off with the marriage in Genesis 2 and it ends off the marriage in Revelation 21 and the marriage at the end of the Bible is how Christ is pictured as the bridegroom and the church is the bride and God says we're going to be united like a married couple but Jesus doesn't marry us because we're perfectly compatible with him Jesus doesn't look at us and say hey I think emotionally vocationally you know good socioeconomic status we're going to be a good match

[39 : 23] Jesus marries us not because of how lovely we are but because of the love in his own heart that he pours out for us and Jesus says to us that that is the picture and the pattern of marriage as well and so what that means is that until we understand God's eternal unconditional unmerited sacrificial love for those of us that are in Christ we will never understand the pattern and the picture of marriage that God has for us but there's something else about the gospel and that is that God's grace doesn't only forgive us it also heals us it also changes us in the language of the Bible God's grace also redeems us it takes that which is broken and flawed sometimes dead and revives us and makes us new again and do you know what that means it means no matter how bad your marriage is no matter how flawed it is how broken it is no marriage is beyond redemption no marriage is beyond healing because the very pattern of marriage is the grace of God that heals and takes broken things and makes them whole again that takes ashes and transforms them into beauty that takes mourning and transforms it into rejoicing the heart of the gospel is that

God takes that which is beyond disrepair and he heals and revives it and makes it new again as a friend I don't know what your marriage is like it could be great it could be terrible you could have gone through the most intense trust breaking difficulty no marriage is beyond redemption because the gospel always gives us hope I want us to land with one brief application so what does this all mean and I want to apply this to both those of us that are married and those of us that are not married about 10 years ago Claire and I knew a couple that were in the same church and they were quite involved in church and their marriage very painfully came to an end ended up in divorce very very painfully and I was talking to the guy about six months to a year later and one of the things that was so confusing for him was that he said we did everything God's way right we didn't live together before we were married we didn't sleep together before we were married we got married in a church with a pastor we did pre-marriage counseling we even prayed about it we followed

God's recipe down to the T I don't understand why it didn't work out and as I've thought about that over the years one of the conclusions that I've come to is this that the kinds of marriages that God wants us to have are not formulaic or transactional they are dynamic and relational and what I mean by that is that the thing that's going to give you a great marriage is not just following the do's and don'ts according to the scripture even though that's important it's actually inviting God into your life and into your marriage day by day hour by hour week by week in other words you can't just say I follow the rules therefore pop my marriage in the oven and out comes this beautiful marriage right it's not like baking not that I'm a baker but I'm told that if you bake follow the instructions right it's not just pop in the oven out comes a beautiful marriage it's day by day saying Christ come and have your way in my life Christ come and shape me by the gospel Jonathan Grant and James Smith I quoted them earlier they said this that many people in their 20s think listen my 20s is my age of exploration self discovery self actualization see the world do what I want to do and when

I hit 30 then I'm going to settle down get married and have kids right and they say that that's like an Olympic hopeful leaving training to the night before that's not going to work out very well for you right and so the key is actually what makes an Olympic athlete brilliant is that 10 or 15 years before they were becoming the kind of person that could perform on that stage in other words what makes you a great spouse is the same thing that makes you a great son or daughter or a great CG member or church member or colleague or employee it's the kind of person that's been so changed by God's grace and so ravished by the gospel that has been so blown away by who Christ is that actually able to pour your life out for the other person it's the kind of person that's so secure in who Christ is that you're not looking to others to complete you but because you're completing Christ you can pour yourself out for others and so what that means is that if you married the way to have a great marriage the kind of marriage that God has designed for us is not just reading a certain book or going on a course and then saying great all done it's actually day by day living a life of confession and repentance examining our heart saying Jesus come and have your way in my life come and change me and transform me to live for you and if you're not married if you're single and you hope to get married one day the way to a great marriage is not just pre-marriage course reading a book or getting married in a church with a pastor it's actually by entering into the love story of the

Bible it's entering into the gospel story of scripture it's letting Jesus so capture your heart and life responding to his initiating love towards you and surrendering to him that you become the kind of person who one day can stand at the altar and can legitimately say all that I am and all that I have like Jesus towards me I give myself to you friends there's so much more we could say but this is God's plan for marriage that one flesh one man one woman come together and give themselves to one another in one flesh union this is God's purpose for marriage that our marriage will be an agent of light and salt of kingdom blessing of heaven on earth this is God's pattern for marriage after the glory of Christ's love for us we will live and love one another too let's pray together Lord Jesus as we look at these topics we we are both as we look at your word God we are both drawn with hope because we know the gospel is always good news and even in the very worst news when we were dead in our sins your gospel gave us new life

[45 : 35] God where our relationships might feel dead you God can breathe new life and so we are encouraged God but we also we come with sober reality God marriage and relationships and even dating relationships and other relationships are also a source of much pain much shame much guilt Jesus we come before you this morning because we need your grace we don't just need a formula we don't just need instructions we don't just need a sermon we need your Holy Spirit and God as Angie reminded us last week Sunday the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in our hearts and lives and is able to raise our marriages our relationships back from the dead Jesus we ask you to come and fill us with hope again won't you come God and shape us and make us the kind of people that will have a great marriage won't you come for those of us that are single God won't you start to shape us by the gospel for those of us that are married shape our hearts

God and Lord we pray that in Watermark and Hong Kong God that your people your families in Hong Kong will be agents for good agents for shalom agents for peace that heaven will come to us because you God have invaded our own hearts with your heavenly grace we pray this Christ in your wonderful and your gracious name Amen Amen