



WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT...

# MARRIAGE

Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church  
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# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE (GENESIS 1-3)

## 1. Read Genesis 1:26-31.

- a. What do you think it means that God made humankind in his image?
- b. What role and responsibility did God give humankind?
- c. What is the significance of God creating humankind as male and female? Why mention it in v27?
- d. What does this passage teach about the purpose of marriage?

## 2. Read Genesis 2:15-25.

- a. For what purpose does God create a companion for the man?
- b. "It is not good for the man to be alone." Alone is often understood to mean lonely. But the context is that Adam has been given a job to do, and he can't do it properly on his own. He needs help. How does change how we understand the purpose of marriage?
- c. What application does the writer draw for his readers (2:24)? What, practically, does this mean?

*One flesh* refers to more than just physical joining. It also represents being one emotionally, personally, socially, economically and legally. (Notice how "flesh" is used to represent the whole in Gen 6:12 and Joel 2:28.)

- d. From v25, what is the nature of their one flesh relationship? (25) How does sin change this (see 3:7)?
3. The word for suitable 'helper' or 'helpmate' in 2:18 and 20 is "ezer". We think of it as a lower position, yet it is mostly used in the Bible to describe how God helps his people. It is about helping someone with what they are lacking. What do we learn about God from these verses?
- a. Gen 49:24
  - b. Exod 18:4
  - c. 1 Sam 7:12
  - d. Ps 33:20
  - e. What might this mean for how we understand the role of the wife?

4. The word for 'suitable' in 2:18 and 20 translates a compound phrase that literally says "like opposite him", and has the idea of *complementarity* (ie fills out what is lacking in the other). How might this explain why God created a female, rather than another male to help Adam?

Modern empirical studies have shown the depth of gender differences in the way we think, feel, behave, work and conduct relationships. At the risk of upholding stereotypes, what are some of the differences between male and female that you have observed?

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>

These differences, by God's design, serve at least two good purposes: As a team, the married couple is better able to do God's work in creation. And as each spouse struggles to understand the other, they are forced to grow in patience and understanding, becoming more like Jesus in the process. Have you experienced either of these two purposes being worked out?

5. **Read Genesis 3:1-16.** Rather than man as head of woman, with both as head over the animals, what is the order of things in Gen 3?

Notice from v6 that Adam is with Eve as she listens to the snake. What should Adam have done?

Apart from pain in child-bearing, what consequence of sin must women bear (16)?

*Sin means that, rather than servant leadership, the husband will often rule his wife, and use his authority to benefit himself. The wife, rather than submit to the loving leadership of her husband, will desire the head position, and seek her own way. This is a recipe for an unhappy and unsatisfying marriage, not according to God's good design.*

6. **Read Matthew 19:1-9.** How does Jesus apply the Genesis 2 principle of one flesh to the question of divorce?

For those of you who are married, how have you experienced what it means to be "one flesh" with your spouse?

How can the truth that God has joined you together with your spouse help you when you are tempted to be unfaithful?

### PRAYER POINTS:

Spend some time praying for each other. Pray for each other's marriages, and for those who are single, pray for the trust and patience to live out God's will where he has placed you at the moment.

# WHAT WISDOM GOD GIVES ABOUT MARRIAGE (PROVERBS)

*There has probably never been greater pressure on the stability of the family. We need to hear Proverb's ancient wisdom more than ever.*

1. What are the characteristics of a wife chosen with wisdom? What are the consequences of a foolish choice?

11:22

12:4

14:1

18:22

19:13-14

21:9; 21:19;

25:24; 27:15-16

A number of these sayings highlight the challenges a “contentious” wife can pose. Remember this is written as advice from a father to his son. What adjectives might a mother use to a daughter about difficult husbands, e.g. “disconnected” or “indifferent” or “passive”? What might such proverbs say?

2. What perspectives are important to remember for a stable, healthy family?

15:16-17

15:27

16:31

17:1

17:6

20:29

30:21-23

3. Adultery and sexual temptation is all around us. Read the following passages, then answer the questions that follow.

5:15-23

6:20-35

7:1-27

20:7

23:26-28

27:8

30:20

What warnings do these passages repeatedly emphasise?

What are the benefits of faithfulness in marriage?

How do these passages describe the allure of illicit sex? Why do you think these things are mentioned?

What do these passages commend as the wise path instead?

Proverbs closes with a poem written in the form of an acrostic – each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. These final verses provide a summary of everything that has gone before them. It's literally an 'A to Z of Proverbs,' cast as a description of 'an excellent wife.'

4. **Read Proverbs 31:10-31.** Proverbs 1:1-3 describes the purpose of Proverbs as helping us live a wise, righteous and disciplined life. How does the excellent wife exemplify each of these qualities?

wise

righteous

disciplined

5. In Proverbs 1:8 we saw that 'the fear of the Lord' is the beginning of wisdom. How does the excellent wife demonstrate this?

6. From the start, Proverbs has been set in the context of a father instructing his son... and any dad would be delighted for a son to find a wife like this! In that context, it's as much about what a mother would instruct her daughter to look for in a wise, virtuous husband. How might we re-write this as a description of such a husband?

*A husband of noble character, who can find? He is worth far more than rubies. His wife has full confidence in him...*

PRAYER POINTS:

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT SEX (SONG OF SOLOMON)

Modern society generally does not understand genuine love as God intended it. In its place come lust and pornography, the perverters of real love, where self-gratification and exploitation of others pose as counterfeits of the genuine article. It sees the desire for sex as a natural appetite, designed to be satisfied, whenever and however you feel like it. To abstain from satisfying yourself sexually is unhealthy, and to not fulfil your potential as a human being.

In contrast, God's view, as revealed in the Bible, is that sexual desire is an appetite, but that it works best within guidelines (as indeed does the appetite for food!) Sex is best when it is within marriage between a man and a woman. Christianity (and Judaism before it) "may be the most body-positive religion in the world." (Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 221). People assume that the Bible is prudish, teaching that sex is demeaning and dirty, however this is blatantly wrong. "God created sexuality and gave woman and man to each other in the beginning. The Bible contains great love poetry that celebrates sexual passion and pleasure. If anyone says that sex is bad or dirty in itself, we have the entire Bible to contradict him." (*ibid*, 221)

## SONG OF SOLOMON

There are countless interpretations of almost every verse of this book. Part of our difficulty is that the language is full of metaphor and double meaning. At times it is also difficult to tell what is actually happening, what is only wishful thinking, and even what is a dream. At times it is difficult even to identify who is speaking.

The Song of Solomon is about sex; but only in a secondary sense. It is about sex in the context of committed, monogamous love. The descriptions are daring, provocative and suggestive rather than explicit and raunchy. In that sense, it does not serve as a sex manual.

The title is "Solomon's Song of Songs." It is a song written by Solomon. That also creates problems for us; he was wiser than any man who lived (1 Ki 4:30), but he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Ki 11:3). Should we really be taking relationship advice from a man who got it so wrong?!

### **Solomon - the outsider to love**

One interpretation<sup>1</sup> that makes a lot of sense is that Solomon reflects on love, sex and relationships from a lifetime of having got it wrong. He writes of pure, sexual, monogamous young love from the position of an outsider. His intent is that people don't make the mistakes that he made.

**Read 8:11-12:** Solomon's "vineyard" is probably his harem. His "tenants" are those who manage it and expand it. They offer women a thousand shekels of silver to enter his harem, and take two hundred shekels as commission. Women don't say no to Solomon – until one woman said, "My own vineyard (body – see 1:6, 4:12) is mine to give – you can't buy it. Keep your money!" She only has eyes for her betrothed.

As Solomon reflects on this rejection, perhaps as he watches the woman and her betrothed walk off into the sunset, he realises he's missed out on love. And so he writes a song for other women so that they might wait for love – read the repeated chorus of the song, "*Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). In other words, don't settle for sex for the wrong reasons, like money. Be patient and wait for genuine love. It's worth it! (While Proverbs,

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<sup>1</sup> See Douglas Sean O'Donnell's excellent commentary in the "Preaching the Word" series, *The Song Of Solomon: An Invitation To Intimacy*.

the topic of the previous study, was written for young men, this is written by Solomon for young women and has the same message: Wait, don't rush into love!)

### Love in the real world

1. **Read 1:5-7.** What difficulties does the woman face?
2. **Read 1:8-2:7.** The couple both appear to be farmers. 1:12-2:7 describes their "picnic date" under the open sky. He is HER king (1:12), and their palace is the open countryside (1:16-17). They make the most of the time they can catch together. How do they compliment each other in this section?



The couple might give us two pieces of advice to spice up our romance.

- a. *You don't need money to enjoy a date – just the right person, and imagination!*
- b. *Don't wait for the perfect "romantic moment". Be pro-active. Make it happen!*

### One love

3. Despite Solomon's harem, this song is in praise of monogamy. What do we learn from the following verses about the couple's commitment to each other?

1:3-4:

2:1-2 (rose of Sharon = a wildflower)

2:16 (6:3):

6:8-9:

7:10-11

8:1-2

8:6-7

8:10 (By remaining an impenetrable wall (sexually pure), she brings contentment to her husband)

### The dreamer

4. **Read chapter 3.** It seems to be a dream in two parts, both focussed on her lover. The first part is looking for, then finding, him. (See 5:2-8 that seems to describe a dream where she does *not* find him). In 3:6-11 she seems to be dreaming of her ideal wedding, perhaps basing it on having seen one of the REAL Solomon's wedding.

What lesson does the repeated chorus of 3:5 teach about this comparison between reality and the romantic ideal?

### **The talker**

5. **Read chapter 4.** How would you describe his compliments to his beloved?

The beloved returns the compliments in 5:10-16. How would you describe her compliments to him?

6. What is the difference between compliment and flattery?

How easy do you find it to give compliments? Why/ why not?

What do we learn from chapter 4 about the relational intimacy of the couple?

### **Character and chemistry are both important**

7. **Read 1:1-3.** What does the woman find attractive about the man? (His name is his character or his integrity.)

8. **Read 4:9-12.** What does the man find attractive about the woman? (A garden locked up, a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain suggest her chastity.)

### **Sex is good!**

9. From the verses you've read in this study, or elsewhere in Song of Solomon, what hints are there that both man and women enjoy the physical intimacy they share?

### **But sex is not ultimate**

10. **Read the repeated chorus in 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.** The message is not to rush into a physical relationship if the other parts of the relationship are not right. It is part of a bigger picture. **Read 8:8-9.** The lesson for the young girl (and her protective brothers) to learn is to value her chastity, and to be patient for the right time. What consequences do we see in society today of people who rush too quickly into a sexual relationship?

11. As good the couple's physical relationship is, it's not without complications and frustration. **Read 5:1-8.** The lovers anticipate a night-time meeting, but something happens and they don't meet. (It might be a dream, or it might be real). What frustrations do real-life married couple today experience in their physical relationship?

## **PRAYER POINTS:**

Pray for those in our church who struggle with sexual temptation (both single and married).

Pray for the marriages in our church.

Pray that both single and married people would have a godly attitude to sex; (being content wherever God has placed them, valuing sex within God's boundaries, but also not make it an idol to be worshipped.)



# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT LEADERSHIP & SUBMISSION (EPHESIANS 5:22-33)

1. **Read Ephesians 5:21-33.** In chapters 4-5 Paul has been dealing with the new attitudes and behaviour that the people of God should display. He now moves on to how this should show itself in our most important relationships. From v21, what is the basis for our submission in these relationships?

*Submission has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. It is an active choice, and can't be forced by another. It is about humility, service and love out of reverence to the Lord.*

2. What is involved for the wife in submitting in a marriage?
3. What does it mean that the husband is the 'head' of the wife?

What might this look like in practice?

4. What are husbands called to do in marriage?

Who is their role model?

5. How does what Christ does for the church (v25-27) apply to husbands and wives?

6. What does it mean that "he who loves his wife, loves himself" (v28)?

7. What is "this reason" for which a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (v31)?

8. What does it mean for husband and wife to be "one flesh" (v31)?

How can this be encouraged?

How can it be undermined?

9. What is the “profound mystery” that Paul is talking about in v32?
  
10. Is there a difference between the *love* a husband has for his wife, and the *respect* a wife has for her husband (v33)?
  
11. What principles can you work on from this section to help you be a better spouse (or potential spouse)?

PRAYER POINTS:

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT TRUE BEAUTY & RESPECT (1 PETER 3:1-7)

1. Read 1 Peter 3:1-7. What does “in the same way” refer to (see 2:13, 18, 21)?

Who is to be a wife’s example of submission?

What does this look like in practice?

2. What is the purpose of a wife choosing to submit to her non-Christian husband (v1)?

3. What method does Peter command for evangelising a non-Christian husband?

Do you think this is wise counsel? Why/ why not?

Do you think the same method applies for Christian husbands with non-Christian wives?

4. What is the Biblical definition of true beauty (v3-4)?

5. How does a person cultivate inner beauty?

How does one gain character?

Why is true character so important and precious to God?

6. How did the holy women of the past make themselves beautiful?

Why are they described as those who “put their hope in God”?

Why might women in this situation be tempted to “give way to fear” (v6)?

7. In what way are husbands to live “in the same way” as their wives (v7)?

8. Wives are described in two ways in v7; as *weaker partners* (perhaps to do with strength, or else the idea of precious fragility), and as *co-heirs* of the gracious gift of life. Why are each of these reasons for the husband to treat his wife with respect and consideration?

9. Why do men sometimes try to dominate their wives? Why do wives sometimes try to dominate their husbands?

What harm does this do?

How is domination of another person contrary to God's nature?

10. What is the connection between treating your wife properly and your prayers being unhindered?

11. How are verses 1 and 7 an example of applying 2:16 to marriage?

PRAYER POINTS:

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT SEXUAL IMMORALITY

## (1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 – 20)

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-20:** Verses 9-11 presuppose a basic difference between the Corinthian church and the people around them. What changed? What was the result of that change?

How have YOU changed since you became a Christian?

2. Verses 9-11 seem to be link verses between a section on lawsuits (6:1-8) and the section on sexual immorality (6:12-20). What is his point in these verses, and how does it connect to each section?
3. In 6:12-13 Paul seems to be quoting the false teachers. What might they have taught?

How might this have related to the pride and boasting in immorality of 5:2,6?

What is Paul's argument against these proverbs?

4. Paul says that such a teaching has the wrong focus. It concentrates on things of this world rather than the world to come. What is the right attitude to this world (v12-14)?
5. What is the connection between the Christian and Christ? What are the ethical consequences of this? (v14-20)
6. In what way is sexual sin different from other sins? What is wrong with the thinking of some that sex is just an appetite which needs to be satisfied?
7. What does it mean in practice that "you are not your own" (v19)?

PRAYER POINTS:

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT SINGLENES (1 CORINTHIANS 7)

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 7.** There is an obvious break here at the start of Ch 7. On the other hand, what connections are there between Ch 6 and 7?
2. The Corinthians had obviously written to Paul with some questions. Looking behind Paul's answer, what do you think the question was?
3. In what way is it "good" not to marry? See v32-35.

Why then does Paul advocate that both men and women should marry?

4. Is Paul's emphasis on "rights" or "duties" in v3-7?

How does this compare to modern views of marriage?

How do the duties of marriage relate to combating the immorality of the time (v2-7)?

5. Why might prayer have been mentioned (v5)?
6. Why does Paul merely give advice rather than a command (v6-9)?
7. To "remain" or "stay" is a big theme in these verses –see v17; 20; 24. It is possible that Corinthian misunderstandings arose concerning the coming of the kingdom of God. Some aspects of God's kingdom had begun with Jesus' death and resurrection, but others were still to come. The end of the ages had begun, but God's kingdom hadn't fully arrived yet. Christians need to remain, and live for that day.

What are the different situations that Paul is encouraging them to "remain" in through this chapter?

8:

10-14:

18-19:

21-23:

25-26:

39-40:

8. How does the nature of his advice in v10-11 differ from that which follows (v12f)?

Why does Paul make the distinction?

9. A situation which makes sense of Paul's commands involves Christian women abstaining from sexual relations with their non-believing husbands because they felt that they would become unclean, or because the world was perishing and such relationships were no longer needed.

How do both Jesus' words, and Paul's own advice (v10-13), address this situation?

Imagine you were one of the women who wanted to leave your unbelieving husband. How would you have received Paul's words?

10. How does v 14 answer their misunderstanding?

This verse is NOT saying that unbelieving husbands and children will be saved. The probable idea is that they come under greater exposure to the gospel. The language can perhaps be explained as Paul's response to the Corinthians' question.

11. Verses 29-31 have been understood in various ways. Paul sums up with a series of contrasts between this age and the age to come, or perhaps describes how the present should be viewed in terms of the future. In everything we do, we should remember that "this world in its present form is passing away" (v31).

How are v32-35 an application of this principle?

How should this truth affect our attitude to work, relationships, possessions, priorities, ministries etc?

12. Verses 36-38 seem to be addressed to fathers with unmarried engaged daughters. The NIV is misleading. NASB has "towards his virgin daughter". Perhaps the indecision was caused by the "present crisis" v26. The situation is unclear, but Paul's solution is not. There is no right or wrong as long as the man has thought the situation through. How is this a further application of the principle in v38?

PRAYER POINTS:

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY (ROMANS 1:16-32)

Today we live in the aftermath of the 1960s sexual revolution. There is a significant change in community views about sexual morality including homosexual behaviour. An active gay lifestyle is becoming increasingly accepted and, in some circles, celebrated and promoted. The push for gay marriage to be accepted has gained momentum and has been adopted in a number of Western countries.

Historically the Church has taught that homosexual sex is contrary to Biblical teaching. This stance has come under increasing community criticism. The Church is now being regularly branded 'homophobic' by critics. This topic is extremely sensitive and opinion, even within the church, is quite diverse. It raises many issues about human identity, sexuality and the definition of marriage. Critics note that the traditional teaching of the Church is turning many people away. With so many political parties and countries changing their view on this matter should the Church also change? How should Christians respond?

## **The Binaries Of God's Creation**

1. **Read Genesis 1.** How many complementary pairs are listed in Gen 1? (see e.g. vv.1, 2, 4, 5[x2], 6, 10, 14, 16, 18, 20, 27)
2. What might this 'complementary pairing' suggest in terms of human identity?

## **Biblical Marriage**

3. **Read Genesis 2:18-24 and Matthew 19:4-6.** How do these passages describe a marriage? What are the purposes of marriage?

While everything is declared 'good' in Genesis 1, according to v.18 of Genesis 2 the creation of the man alone is 'not good'. God remedies this by creating his complementary partner, 'Eve', to overcome his 'aloneness'. Eve is a 'suitable' partner in that she is the same yet different. She 'suits' him and is a 'helper' for Adam, made from his rib so as not to dominate him nor be dominated by him. He celebrates Eve's arrival v.23 and v.24 notes how a marriage begins: by 'leaving' one's parents, being united to a suitable helper and enjoying a 'one flesh' relationship for sexual fulfilment and procreation. All of these qualities are intended as happening between a man and a woman, not between two men or two women.

## **The Old Testament & Homosexual Activity**

4. **Read Genesis 19:1-5, Judges 19:22, Leviticus 18:21-22, 20:13.** What do these passages say about homosexual behaviour?



## The New Testament & Homosexual Activity

5. **Read I Corinthians 6:9-10, I Timothy 1:9-10.** What do these passages say about homosexual acts?

All of these passages take a similar stance to the Old Testament. Homosexual and lesbian sexual activity are contrary to human identity as God created it, and forbidden. In Romans I it is a behaviour of those who have 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped created things rather than the Creator' leading to 'an exchange of natural sexual relations for unnatural ones' v26.

6. **Read Romans 1:16-32.** What is the connection between idolatry (23,25) and homosexual sin (24, 26-27)?

Why is homosexual sin singled out?

What does it mean that "God gave them over" (24, 26, 28)?

Although homosexual sin is singled out, it is not the only sin deserving God's judgment. Verses 29-32 is a comprehensive list that most of us are guilty of most of. How does this inform the attitude we should have to those engaging in homosexual behaviour?

*Homophobia is rife in some churches. However in the NT passages homosexual behaviour is listed alongside many other sinful behaviours, including greed and lying. Christians are called to love and to welcome all people, as Jesus did. Acting out fear or hatred in violence or abuse is never Christian.*

7. **Read James 1:12-15.** What is the connection between temptation, desire, and sin?

Some Christians experience same-sex attraction. What advice does this passage give to such people?

How might you, and our church, be able to help someone in this situation?

PRAYER POINTS: