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Building a Marriage That Really Works

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Kay Arthur, David & BJ Lawson

PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

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BIBLE STUDIES



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WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

BUILDING A MARRIAGE THAT REALLY WORKS

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*Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.*

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# BUILDING A MARRIAGE THAT REALLY WORKS

As children, little girls often used to play dress up, with a blanket draped over their heads to serve as a “bride’s veil” as they dreamed about their future wedding day. Together, little girls and boys played “house,” with Daddy going to work and Mommy taking care of the kids and cooking the meals. Daddy would come home and kiss Mommy, then they would sit down to dinner and talk about the events of the day.

Such innocent days soon gave way to grownup responsibilities, where the experience of real-life marriage seems much more difficult than we dreamed as children. And in these days where the definitions of family and home have been stretched and challenged, the husband-wife relationship presents more challenges

than ever before. Divorce has either directly or indirectly affected virtually all of us. Blended families and multiple-income households seem to be the standard of our day.

So how can we follow God's design for marriage in our modern-day world? In the weeks ahead we will take a look at the institution of marriage and the roles of the husband and the wife, as well as examine key principles regarding communication, love, and finances. Through this study you will discover how to establish and maintain the kind of marriage God intended you to have—one that will last “until death us do part.”

## WEEK ONE

After God created the heavens and the earth and everything on the earth, He formed the most magnificent of all His creatures—man and woman. More detail is given regarding the sixth day of creation than any of the others, indicating the significance of these distinctive creations. God created man and woman for a unique relationship with Him and with each other.

We are going to begin our study this week by looking at God's design for marriage. Can it truly be a permanent, meaningful, joyful relationship?

### OBSERVE

Genesis is the book of beginnings. Let's take a look at the Creation account of man and woman and the beginning of this institution we call "marriage."

**Leader:** *Read aloud Genesis 1:26-28.*

- *Have the group underline every reference to **man**, including any pronouns.*

### DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *man* in each verse?
- What did you learn from these verses about male and female?

### GENESIS 1:26-28

**26** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

**27** God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

- What role and responsibilities did God give to both male and female in verse 28?
- Could God’s instructions be carried out by two men or two women? What does this tell you about the institution of marriage?
- Discuss why it is significant that God gave the same responsibilities to both the male and the female.

#### INSIGHT

Genesis 1 gives us the big picture of Creation, an overview that tells us at a glance what happened from the first day of Creation through the sixth. In Genesis 2, God focuses on the details of man’s creation. Some consider the two accounts in chapters 1 and 2 contradictory, but they are not. They simply record the events from different perspectives.

## OBSERVE

The beginning of Genesis 2 gives us further insight into man's creation.

**Leader:** *Read aloud Genesis 2:7-8,18-20.*

*Have the group...*

- *mark every reference to **God**, including pronouns, with a triangle: *
- *underline every reference to **man**, including pronouns and synonyms.*

## DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to man?
- After God created man and placed him in the garden, what did God say?
- According to these verses, why did God make woman?

## GENESIS 2:7-8,18-20

**7** Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

**8** The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.

**18** Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

**19** Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what

he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

**20** The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

#### GENESIS 2:21-24

**21** So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.

**22** The LORD God fashioned into a

#### INSIGHT

Man needed “a helper suitable for him.” The word for *helper* in Hebrew does not mean “servant” or “slave.” The word is most commonly used in the Bible in reference to God as our helper, often in a military sense. A helper in this sense would be someone—superior or equal—who comes alongside to support another in a situation that can’t be handled alone. According to this passage, man needed help—a partner every bit his equal whose strengths would compensate for his weaknesses.

#### OBSERVE

**Leader:** Read aloud Genesis 2:21-24.

- Have the group circle every reference to *woman*, including pronouns.

## DISCUSS

- Discuss how God created the woman.
- Looking at what you've marked in this passage, ask the "5 Ws and an H"—who, what, when, where, why, and how—to see what the text tells you about woman.
- **Why** was she created?
- **When** was she created, relative to man's creation?
- For **whom** was she created? Why was this important?
- According to verse 23, **what** did man say when God brought the woman to him?
- "For this reason" in verse 24 refers back to verses 21-23. According to verse 24, what is to happen when a couple marries?

woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

**23** The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

**24** For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

**INSIGHT**

The term “joined to” (translated “cleave” in some Bibles) means “to glue together, to adhere to, to stick to.” It carries the idea of loyalty and devotion.

Imagine two pieces of construction paper, one red and one green. If you were to glue them together and let the glue dry, what would happen if you pulled them apart? Would there be a clean break? No, you would find that some of the red still clings or adheres to the green and vice versa. You could expect some tearing as well.

The same is true of a marriage relationship. Once two people are joined together in marriage, there's no such thing as a “clean break” when it comes to divorce. Even if no children are involved, the participants will experience a tearing of intimacy, emotions, etc.

- What does the phrase “one flesh” tell us about God’s plan for marriage?
- When two become “one” in marriage, they are joined together. What happens if they separate from one another?
- Discuss how knowing this should affect the marriage relationship.

## OBSERVE

**Leader:** Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 aloud.

- Have the group draw a box around every reference to **bodies** or **members**, including pronouns.

## DISCUSS

- What did you learn from this passage about the sexual relationship?

## 1 CORINTHIANS 6:15-16

<sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!

<sup>16</sup> Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “The two shall become one flesh.”

**MATTHEW 19:3-10**

<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”

<sup>4</sup> And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’

<sup>6</sup> “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

**OBSERVE**

So far we have seen that God intended marriage to be permanent. Are there any exceptions to this?

**Leader:** *Read Matthew 19:3-10 aloud. Have the group say aloud and mark...*

- every reference to **God**, including pronouns, with a triangle: 
- every reference to **divorce**, including pronouns, with a slash, like this: 

**DISCUSS**

- What do you discern to be God’s attitude toward marriage? Why?
- Why did Moses permit divorce, according to these verses?
- What does the desire to divorce one’s mate reveal about the condition of the heart?

- According to verse 9, if a person divorces his or her mate and marries another, what is he or she guilty of?
- What are the exceptions, if any, to this?
- Why do you suppose this is true?
- What conclusion did the disciples draw from this teaching?
- How does knowing this affect your attitude about marriage?

<sup>7</sup> They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

<sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

<sup>9</sup> “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

**MALACHI 2:13-16**

**13** “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

**14** “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

**15** “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring?

**OBSERVE**

Let’s look at an Old Testament passage that touches on God’s view of divorce.

**Leader:** *Read Malachi 2:13-16 aloud. Have the group...*

- *circle every reference to **wife**, including pronouns.*
- *mark **divorce** with a slash, as before.*

**DISCUSS**

- Why wouldn’t God accept the offering the people were bringing?
- How did the people respond to His rejection of their offerings?
- What did you learn by marking *divorce*?

## OBSERVE

Before we wrap up this week's study, let's examine one other verse that describes God's perspective on marriage.

**Leader:** *Read aloud Hebrews 13:4.*

- *Have the group draw a box around each occurrence of **marriage**.*

## DISCUSS

- According to this verse, how is marriage to be regarded?
- What would defile the marriage bed?
- What will God do to those who defile it?
- Summarize and discuss what you've learned about marriage this week.

Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

**16** “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

### HEBREWS 13:4

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

## WRAP IT UP

God designed Adam and Eve for a unique relationship with Him. No other creatures enjoyed this kind of union. The first couple was made in God's image, was given dominion over the rest of creation, and enjoyed daily fellowship with the Creator.

Tragically, Adam and Eve made a wrong choice; they ate the forbidden fruit and sin entered the world. In the weeks ahead, we'll look at how this affected the marriage relationship. For now, we need to acknowledge that, because of sin, marriage takes work; however, God enables believers to succeed despite the challenges by providing not only an instruction manual but also His Holy Spirit, who enables us to carry out the instructions in Scripture. All we have to do is to follow the directions carefully.

God intended marriage to be permanent, an intimate relationship in which two are irrevocably joined together as one. Marriage is an earthly picture of the relationship between Jesus and His church, the bride of Christ. Marriages are intended to be living testimonies of Jesus' inseparable union with believers. When husbands and wives fight, grow distant, or separate, God's portrait of the spiritual relationship is marred. We'll learn more about this in upcoming lessons.



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# No-Homework Bible Studies

That Help You Discover Truth For Yourself

