

God's Design for Marriage

We didn't invent the concept of marriage – it was God's idea. His purpose and design for marriage is found in the Bible. If you want your marriage to be healthy and strong, then follow the blueprints God provided.

Marriage is about two becoming one.

When you choose to get married, you need to understand that you are forging a bond that's never meant to be broken. In God's eyes, you become one entity. It's no longer about two separate individuals.

Genesis 2:24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

Marriage means you leave your families to make your own.

Getting married means you start a new family, with your own traditions and values. Even though each of your families have had great influence in your lives, it's time to leave and create your own family that both of you can get excited about.

The vows you take are promises.

On your wedding day, the main event culminates with the repeating of your vows to one another. Your vows aren't just statements you repeat to seal the deal. They are promises that you are pledging to keep til death. If you don't feel ready to fulfill those promises, then don't get married until you are.

Matthew 19:4-6 4“Haven't you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ 5And he said, “‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ 6Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.”

Divorce should never be an option.

God's design for marriage is that it's an unbreakable bond. Vows aren't written with an “opt out” clause. Don't give up on your promises to one another. Be committed to making it work.

Malachi 2:16 16“For I hate divorce!” says the lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the lord of Heaven's Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [set up the conversation](#).
2. Do you care about God's opinion regarding marriage? Explain.
3. What's the significance of two people becoming one in marriage?

4. What happens when one or both are selfish in the marriage?
5. Reflect on some traditional vows you hear at weddings. What does each vow mean?
6. Do you feel ready to take those vows? Explain.
7. Why should divorce never be an option for you?
8. Make sure to take the [Couple Survey](#) before your next meeting.
9. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.

Pre-Marriage Principle #1: Love is a Choice, Not Just a Feeling

In our culture, love is all about feelings. The story line is always about all consuming, overwhelming romance. But this is unrealistic in an authentic marriage, and the Bible has a different definition for love.

The problem with feelings

The problem with feelings is that they're always changing. People are fickle. Feelings can be dangerous and can lead us astray, especially when it comes to relationships. A healthy marriage is not built on feelings or emotions.

Marital love in the Bible

Marital love in the Bible is based on a promise. When a man and woman come together in marriage, they're making a covenant – a commitment. It's not a contract, where failure to keep up your end of the bargain can easily result in divorce. God wants us to fight for our marriages, to stand for our spouse in thick and thin.

***Proverbs 20:25** Don't trap yourself by making a rash promise to God and only later counting the cost.*

Marriage Principle #1

If you want a healthy marriage, it all starts with how you define love. Here's the first principle of a healthy marriage: Love is a choice, not just a feeling. you have to get love right. Feelings aren't bad – but they come and go. The valiant part of marital love is the choosing part.

The ultimate analogy

The greatest demonstration of love in history came at the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he was demonstrating sacrificial love. He didn't feel like dying that painful death, but he did it for love. God had made a covenant long before, and he proved faithful. The Bible uses marriage as an analogy for this incredible act of love. Marriage is a picture of Jesus and the church.

***Ephesians 5:25-27** For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.*

Discussion Questions

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [set up the conversation](#).
2. What's your favorite romantic comedy? What are the underlying messages about "love"? How has your marriage stacked up to that comparison?
3. Make two lists: (1) how feelings can be good (2) how feelings cause problems. How have feelings affected your marriage, positively and negatively?
4. Read [Proverbs 20:25](#). Have you seriously considered the vows you'll take on your wedding day? List some promises you plan to make on that day.

5. Have you already made some sacrifices in your relationship? Explain. What other sacrifices do you think you might make once you're married?
6. Read [Ephesians 5:25-27](#). What did Christ do to set his bride (the Church) apart? What does it mean for you to [set your spouse apart](#) in marriage?
7. Talk about [the 5 love languages](#). Which one is your love language? Which one is your fiancé's primary love language?
8. What are some practical ways you can start speaking your fiancé's language?
9. Look over the [Couple's Survey](#) and discuss their answers on the "character" and "love" sections.
10. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.

Pre-Marriage Principle #2: Trust is Earned, Not Freely Given

Choosing love will help your marriage to last a lifetime. But if you want it to also be healthy and fulfilling, you'll need a second principle, and it's all about trust.

Defining trust

Trust is “relying on the integrity or ability of another person”. Notice the emphasis in the definition. Your ability to trust is based on someone else, not you. It requires the ability to rely on someone else's character. In marriage, your ability to trust your spouse starts with your spouse.

Marriage Principle #2

Let's get right to our second marriage principle: Trust is earned, not freely given. Trust isn't something that just happens in a relationship. It has to be earned by proving your character over and over. Even in a marriage, trust cannot be demanded. It must be earned over time.

The task of every spouse

As a spouse, one of your primary tasks is to become trustworthy. That takes commitment and vigilance. Earning trust is like putting money in a bank. The more you've deposited in your “trust account”, the better. Even God doesn't demand our trust – he earns it with his faithfulness.

***Deuteronomy 7:9** Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.*

Three characteristics of trust

It's helpful to know what to expect with trust. It's reactive: a wife reacts with trust based on a husband's track record. It's also measurable: there are always clear data points for trustworthy people. And it's time-consuming: earning trust doesn't happen overnight.

Trust vs. Forgiveness

Many people confuse the ideas of trust and forgiveness. The Bible commands us to freely forgive, but it warns us to cautiously trust. Trust is different than [forgiveness in marriage](#), but they're both must-haves.

Discussion Questions

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [set up the conversation](#).
2. Who is the most trustworthy person in your life? How did they earn that title?
3. Do you agree that trust needs to be earned? Explain.
4. What are the dangers of trusting someone who hasn't proven to be trustworthy?
5. On a scale from 1-10, rate the “trust factor” in your relationship. Explain your answer. What can you personally do to earn more trust?
6. Read [Deuteronomy 7:9](#). What does it say about God that He is willing to earn our trust? Share ways God has earned your trust.

7. Give a personal example of how trust can be reactive, measurable, or time-consuming.
8. Have you dealt with [broken trust](#) in your relationship? Explain. How do you see this issue affecting your marriage?
9. What role does [forgiveness](#) play in earning trust? Is there an area where you need to extend forgiveness to your fiancé, even if he/she still has trust to earn?
10. Look over the [Couple's Survey](#) and discuss their answers on the "trust" section.
11. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.

Pre-Marriage Principle #3: Healthy Couples Keep Talking

The third principle for a healthy marriage is all about communication and conflict. Couples need to learn how to express their thoughts, feelings and expectations in a productive way.

Marriage Principle #3

Here it is: Healthy couples keep talking. Conflict is not something to fear. With good communication, you can be confident that you can resolve your conflicts and grow closer as a couple.

Conflict in a healthy marriage

“Fighting” in your marriage is a good thing, if you do it right. It’s a sign that you’re willing to engage with your spouse on matters of your relationship. It’s never a good sign when one person wants to give up and shut down. So don’t look to avoid conflict in your marriage. Instead, view it as an opportunity to grow.

3 wrong ways to fight

Before we get to good conflict, let’s point out three common habits that are unhealthy in marriage. See if you can recognize any of this in your own marriage:

- **Escalation.** “Escalators” do a lot of yelling in a fight. They become an aggressor causing the other to fear that it isn’t safe to engage.
- **Withdrawal.** The “withdrawer” wants to avoid conflict at all costs. Instead of admitting their disappointment, they stuff their true feelings and quietly resent their spouse.
- **Invalidation.** The “invalidator” likes to be condescending and make their spouse feel stupid. This might be the worst habit of all, because it demeans your spouse and points to an underlying issue of pride.

The right way to fight

Healthy couples fight against the bad habits of communication and replace them with good habits. Your goal in marriage should be to build up your spouse with your words, even in conflict. Instead of saying hurtful things, choose to find a productive way to express yourself so it benefits your spouse.

Ephesians 4:29 *Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

Discussion Questions

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [set up the conversation](#).
2. How did communication and conflict work in your home growing up?
3. How have you viewed conflict in your relationship up until now?
4. On a scale from 1-10, how often do you feel like your fiancé doesn't understand your point of view? What contributes to the breakdown?
5. Which of the poor communication habits do you struggle with the most? How has that habit affected your relationship?
6. Read [Ephesians 4:29](#). On a scale from 1-10, rate your ability to use your words constructively. In what ways can you improve?

7. Talk about [the 3 steps for conflict resolution](#). Do you think this simple method can help you navigate conflict as a couple? Explain.
8. How often do you get to action steps in your conflicts? What keeps you from moving forward?
9. Look over the [Couple's Survey](#) and discuss their answers on the "communication" section.
10. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.

What You Need to Know about Sex Before You Get Married

Sex is an important part of a healthy marriage. That's why it's so important for pre-marital couples to be on the same page about past experiences, expectations, and ultimately God's purpose and design for sex. Here are 3 things you'll want to know before you tie the knot:

The right information about your own personal story

Hopefully, you have already had the talk about your sexual history, if there is one to tell. If you haven't, then you need to have that conversation right away. You both need to know what you're getting into with this union. Past sexual experiences can have health implications for both you and your fiancé. It's also important for building trust. Neither of you want to feel like there is secret information out there.

If you have a "past", make sure you ask for forgiveness from your fiancé that you shared things with others that should have been saved for him/her. Also, make sure to repent before the Lord of past sins. He promises to forgive you and make you new.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

The right expectations about sex in marriage

It's not like the movies. Sex in marriage isn't supposed to be based on lust. It should be based on love and commitment. And, sex can be challenging, especially for women. It can be painful and unfulfilling. Men usually have an easier time with sex. Most men are fully satisfied each time they are intimate but the wife may not. You will have to work together to find ways to meet the needs of your wife. It will require working together to find ways to serve one another. It shouldn't be cheapened by selfish desires but should be an opportunity to serve the other.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4 The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.

The right solutions for potential struggles with sex

If you struggle, don't be embarrassed to talk to each other about it. You're becoming one which means how one feels affects the other. Wives don't want to feel like they get attention from their husband only when he wants some action. Husbands don't want to feel like their wife withholds sex as a punishment when she's mad. Be on the same page about how sex works and where improvements need to be made. Know this, more couples struggle with sex in marriage than don't. If and when you struggle, that doesn't mean you're weird or incompatible. It just means you have some work to do like any other area of your relationship. Be ready to seek counsel from godly people who can help you work through your issues.

Discussion Questions

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [set up the conversation](#).
2. Have you already talked as a couple about your sexual history? How did it go?
3. Are there unresolved issues surrounding this issue? Explain.
4. Why is it important to have the right expectations regarding sex?
5. What can happen if your expectations are very different from your fiancé's?
6. Why shouldn't sex be based on lust?
7. Why is it important to communicate about sex in your marriage?
8. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.