

Meaning of Marriage  
Study Guide #1 Service: Marriage Isn't About You

**Personal Study:**

What do people mean when they say “I do” at their wedding? What are they promising? Most people come to marriage with a set of expectations that they use to evaluate and rate their overall happiness in marriage. Those expectations are created by family history, culture and hopes for your marriage. As if that was not enough, then comes all the various challenges and tests to those expectations and the commitments you made. There is that year where you gain 15 pounds, the season of unemployment when you lost your job, no to mention hitting that wall and not knowing with what to do next, or even something joyful like having your first child which becomes one of those “good stresses”.

There will be no quick fix to any marriage or some formula you can plug into your relationship to change things. When you say “I do”, you’re looking into the face of another broken sinner who needs the grace of Jesus and promising to love and serve them with your life. It is a promise make when you do not yet know what’s coming in life that will test it. You do not know if you have to make do on that “in sickness or in health” promise and you hope for more “better” than “worse”.

Marriage, in our culture, today faces many challenges. One is the growing number of people who claim they don't need a piece of paper to tell them they love each other. What we see is a growing number of couples will live together and not formally marry, which is being called cohabitating. Others have grown up with divorced parents and have experienced genuine wounds from that experience. That childhood background will make them cautious and tentative to enter into marriage. We can also see some people enter into marriage for some really bad reasons like self fulfillment, neediness or a sense of cultural pressure to not be single (instead of seeing a purpose and benefit to their time of singleness). When you look at what people look for in a spouse, typically the top three things are sexual chemistry, compatibility, or finding someone who wouldn't change them.<sup>1</sup> All this is to say, that we enter marriage for a variety of reasons and our culture does not do us any special favors with helping us understand the bigger picture of the meaning of marriage.

What is the goal and purpose of marriage from God's perspective? This study will help us reorient our perspective on marriage around the idea that God has provided married couples with a companion to love and serve.

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<sup>1</sup> See Meaning for Marriage pages 29-30.

The most comprehensive passage on marriage is Ephesians 5:21-33. To get context, read Ephesians 5:8-33.<sup>2</sup>

What are some of your general impression of God's purpose in marriage?

Do you see a theme in how wives and husbands should relate to each other in marriage?

How are the husband and wife called to sacrifice for each other in marriage based on this passage?

How does marriage show us the good news of what Jesus has done?

Do we learn anything about who Jesus is based on what Paul calls this "profound mystery" that marriage represents something deeper than two people declaring their love for each other?

In the book *Meaning of Marriage*, Timothy Keller critiques modern marriage as "me-marriage". He gives some examples and information from articles and studies to show that people enter into marriage for personal fulfillment, happiness and to be served.

What were some of the expectations you had (or have if single) about what marriage should be like?

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<sup>2</sup> \*we will discuss this passage a few more times during this study, especially session 3. Please do not jump ahead just yet and discuss roles in marriage, that will come later on in the study.

What are some of the dangers of a marriage that is built on seeking happiness or self-fulfillment and not a marriage built on serving and loving your spouse?

Read Genesis 2:18-25. How does this passage speak to friendship and companionship in marriage? How does a “me-marriage” harm those aspects of the relationship?

Read the following two quotes from *Meaning of Marriage* and answer the question: how can God use marriage to make sanctify us (make us more holy and more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions)?

“There is the essence of sin, according to the Bible - living for ourselves, rather than for God and the people around us. This is why Jesus can sum up the entire law - the entire will of God for our lives - in two great commandments: to love and live for God rather than ourselves and to love and put the needs of others ahead of our own (Mathew 22:37-40).”

Timothy Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, p63.

“The Christian principle that needs to be at work is Spirit-generated selflessness - not thinking less of yourself or more of yourself but thinking of your self less. It means taking your mind off yourself and realizing that in Christ your needs are going to be met and are, in fact, being met so that you don’t look at your spouse as your savior.”

Timothy Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, p66.

### Questions for Group Discussion:

God designed marriage and family to be a very good thing. It is true that singleness has its advantages in regards to ministry and that not every person gets married. However, we see from the foundations of creation that marriage had a place and a purpose. God saw that Adam was lacking in something, and it is the first time in the Bible that something was “not good” (Genesis 2:18). God has designed marriage with a goal in mind.

What are some of the purposes of marriage based on what we heard in the video discussion tonight?

Marriage serves as a picture of Christ’s relationship with the Church. Keller brought out two points related to this. First, this picture gives us a duty or obligation to serve our spouses because we see the selflessness of God serving his people. Second, when we feel like our spouse is not appreciative or when we do not feel their love, we can be reminded by the gospel that we are loved and be filled with that and give even when we are not receiving.

How does this second aspect in particular give married couples the power to serve their spouse?

Do you feel like the first point, serving our spouses because of the example of God’s service, would be possible without Keller’s second point of that we are loved and filled with the gospel?

If you’re married, can you think of some examples of times when you had your spouse served you when you were not receptive to them? How did that change your heart? *(Please do not share times when the opposite happened — when you served your spouse and they were unreceptive).*

Chris mentioned that if we love our spouses based on their love for us that we will end up being exhausted in the long run because there will be times when that love is not there. He was making the point that we need the love of God to have a healthy marriage and to serve our spouses in the long run.

According to Keller if you do not have a divine source of love and you are not receiving it from your spouse you will look for it elsewhere. How is this dangerous to a marriage?

How does Ephesians 5 point to the gospel and how can that encourage followers of Jesus to love their spouses?

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Kristin said that she would not be able to hold up to the burden of fulfilling all that Joe needed. What are some ways married couples can prevent themselves from expecting other people to meet needs that only God can meet?

Tim and Kathy Keller listed 3 resources married Christian couples have:

1. God is in your marriage
2. Knowledge of God's love and grace which frees you to be open with your faults and failures in your marriage
3. Your spouse is not your savior, God is your savior

Can you think of any other resources that were not listed?

If you're married, what do you think is the most helpful resource to you at this moment?

If you're single which resource do you take the most comfort in knowing?