



MARRIAGE GOD'S WAY

A series of studies from the
Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the PCNSW

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Introduction

Popular music can tell us a lot about our culture. Listen to the songs played in any decade and you'll get a picture of what mattered to those who wrote, and to those who listened.

In 1964, when the Beatles visited Australia, they had the top 5 songs of the year. Every one of those songs was about love. That same year, Chapel of Love was recorded by the Dixie Cups. They sang, "Goin' to the chapel and we're gonna get married". Why? Because "I'll be his and he'll be mine, we'll love until the end of time."

Nearly three decades later, Irish band U2 wrote All I Want Is You. In this song, the girl wants "diamonds on a ring of gold", but her man puts no trust in such promises. Would their love grow cold? No matter - all he wants, right now, is her.

Fast forward to 2012, and Macklemore's Same Love. This anthem for same sex marriage tells us that "underneath it's all the same love", and uses the words of 1 Corinthians 13 - "love is patient, love is kind " - to make the point.

In just five decades, so our music tells us, our society's understanding of marriage has literally undergone a revolution.

Now, waiting for sex until after you're married seems weird in the eyes of the world; de facto relationships are standard, since most couples live together before they get married; the number of couples who choose not to marry at all continues to rise; and about a third of marriages end in divorce.

Even so, marriage is still seen as unique, and something special. People pour lots of money into weddings. The average Australian wedding costs about \$36,000 - some estimates put it as high as \$60,000! We watch reality TV shows about getting couples married, and plenty of TV dramas still have a wedding as a high point.

Australian society has moved a long way from the sexual ethics set out in the Bible.

For Christians, marriage has always been much more than a social institution.

We need to be clear about why marriage matters to God.

These studies are intended to help Christians understand and examine the Biblical view of marriage. Why did God create marriage? What and who is it for? Why does this matter for society? Why does this matter for individuals?

The focus is not mainly to develop a view of same sex marriage, though we will think about that at a few points. What we're doing is something more basic than that. We'll be looking at the broader issue of God's plan for marriage shown in the Bible, and seeing how it relates to various cultural viewpoints. We will notice all

sorts of ways in which the Bible challenges Australian views of marriage.

There are some excellent resources listed at the end of each study that will help couples explore those issues. Whether you are married, do not plan to be married, have been married, want to be married or are somewhere between all of that, marriage will affect you. And marriage is an important part of God's view of human life. There will be a chance to apply this to your own attitudes and actions, whatever your relationships are. You will find that the studies have as much to say to married couples about their unmarried friends as they do to singles about married life.

LEADER'S NOTES

Throughout the studies there will be notes for leaders in these boxes. They are designed to help leaders guide the group's thinking, keep the discussion on track, get through the material in a reasonable amount of time, and flag potential pastoral concerns.

The purpose of these studies is to give people an opportunity to really think about and clarify their views on marriage as God presents it. Understanding what God thinks about marriage can help us understand many other issues from God's perspective too.

Before beginning the study, make sure every member of your group has their own copy of the studies and a Bible.

If you don't have a good length of time together, ask people to prepare for the week by looking over the study prior to coming, or by looking up some of the Bible verses mentioned.

It's also a great idea to begin each study with prayer - thanking God for the opportunity to study his word and learn together, and asking for humility, understanding and robust discussion as you work through the studies together.

Study #1

Marriage God's Way

What *is* marriage?

Read Matthew 19:4-6

The **aim** of Study 1 is to establish **God's design** of marriage as between a man and a woman, voluntarily entered into, for life.

The Message is a paraphrase, presenting Matthew 19:4-6 in this way:

He answered, "Haven't you read in your Bible that the Creator originally made man and woman for each other, male and female? And because of this, a man leaves father and mother and is firmly bonded to his wife, becoming one flesh—no longer two bodies but one. Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart."

- Matthew 19:4-6 (The Message)

How does The Message paraphrase differ from others? What does it bring out in the passage? Is a different point emphasized, and if so, how does that help you understand what Jesus is saying?

The Message is a paraphrase of the Bible, not a translation. It is an attempt to put the message of the Bible into contemporary language. Some people in the group may not like this paraphrase, and that's fine. It is there to spark discussion.



God created the world and everything in it. He ordered the universe and humanity. True freedom and purpose come from living within God's patterns found in creation and his will as found in the Bible. Let's take a look at God's design of marriage as it unfolds in the Bible.

Read Genesis 1:26-31. What does it tell us about the way God made us? What does it say about the purpose for which the man and the woman were created?

Read Genesis 2:15-25. Why did God create woman? What is unique about the bond between the man and the woman in this passage?

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Australia, in 2013, delivered this statement which is a summary of the Biblical view of marriage.

“The true definition of marriage is found in God’s Word when it reports him as saying: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It is the lifelong union of one man with one woman, voluntarily entered into, excluding all others.”

This gives us a definition of marriage. Apart from the Genesis passages, there are others that speak about marriage. How do they illustrate or add to what we have already read?

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

1 Corinthians 7:39-40

Colossians 3:18-19

1 Timothy 3:12

Titus 1:6

John 2:1-11

One way to keep the study moving here is to ask one person to look up each passage and, in turn, show how their passage contributes to the discussion. This would also be a section which people could look at during the week to prepare for the study.

Focus the discussion by using the elements of the definition of marriage used in the studies: lifelong, exclusive, voluntary and between a man and a woman.

How are other views of marriage different to what we see in these passages?



But wait! There's more to marriage! In his abundant grace, God designed marriage not only as we have seen so far, but as an incredible illustration of his relationship with his people – reflecting a deep union and love.

Read Isaiah 62:1-5. What does verse 5 show us about the relationship between marriage and the way God views his people?

Read Ephesians 5:21-33. What parallels does Paul draw when comparing the marriage relationship, between a husband and wife, to the relationship between Christ and the church?

How does the relationship between God and his people, between Christ and his church, help us understand marriage? And how does marriage help us understand God?

Thinking it through

The following statement is from the Marriage Service of the Presbyterian Church of Australia:

“Marriage is a state of life which God has provided for mankind. Jesus, our Lord, honoured it by his presence at a marriage in Cana in Galilee. Throughout the Scriptures, marriage is an honoured relationship and in the New Testament the bond of marriage is seen as a sign of the loyalty and the love that exists between Christ and his church.”

Most Christian wedding services begin with a statement something like this. What do you think might catch the attention of a non-Christian who hears this at a Christian wedding?

Max Lucado, a best selling Christian author, wrote:

“God created marriage. No government subcommittee envisioned it. No social organization developed it. Marriage was conceived and born in the mind of God.”

What impact does this truth have on the marriage debate?

The group should see that marriage is not open for redefinition by humans, as it was instituted and defined by God.

Reflecting and Applying

In your group, discuss some of the following questions and issues.

- Holding to a biblical view of marriage is often seen as out of date. What are some ways we can present the beauty and richness of the Biblical view of marriage?
- In this study, we have looked at God's design of marriage. As we continue further in this series of studies, we will look at the purposes of marriage for family and society, at singleness and at what happens when marriages go wrong. Based on what we have looked at so far, what questions do you have that you would like answered in the rest of the studies?

Keep a record of the answers to this question and look ahead to see if they are covered in future studies. If they are outside the scope of the studies, talk to your minister or do some research for direction.

Praying

Thank God for Christian marriages.

Brainstorm the ways in which we can pray about this issue. For example: We can pray that Christian marriages model the reality of a Godly marriage to others. Pray through the list together.

Resources for further reading

Marriage Matters, a resource paper from the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the PCNSW. Available on the Committee website: gsandc.org.au (12 pages, general readership)

Christopher Ash, *Married for God*, (IVP, 2007) (176 pages, written for both married couples and those not married)

Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 2013) (352 pages, general readership, study guide available)

John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, (Crossway, 2012) (192 pages, general readership, available as free pdf: <http://document.desiringgod.org/this-momentary-marriage-en.pdf?1439242071>)

Study #2

Marriage for companionship and sex

The **aim** of Study 2 is to show that the primary picture of marriage is of a husband and wife, fully one, standing before God.

"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

- Song of Songs 6:3

In the last study, we learned about the way God has designed marriage. In this study and the next, we look at the way in which God created marriage to bless us. First we will look at the way marriage is created for companionship and to be the context for sexual union.

The Bible celebrates marriage as a relationship of blessing for both husbands and wives as companions to one another. What do the following passages teach us about the relationship between a husband and wife?

Genesis 2:18, 23-25

Genesis 24:62-67

Proverbs 12:4

Ecclesiastes 9:9

Ephesians 5:22-28

Here is an opportunity to ask group members to do some preparation. Divide these passages up and ask one or two members to read them and think on them during the week. **OR**, during the study, assign the passages to different group members to read and explain to the group.



Christians sometimes focus on having children as the purpose for marriage. Children are a great blessing to a marriage, but the Bible shows that the first purpose for marriage is that a husband and wife know each other deeply as they work together and support each other.

Think about marriages that you see around you. How do they reflect this picture of companionship and support? Share a time when you have seen a marriage provide companionship and support (either your own marriage, or another).

Marriage is also given by God as the proper place for the expression of erotic love.

What do the following passages tell us about the nature of sexual love between a husband and wife?

Proverbs 5:15-19

Song of Solomon 7 (actually, the whole book!)

1 Corinthians 7:1-6

There are reasons why talking about sex, even sex within marriage, can be uncomfortable. If this is the case for your group, have a strategy ready! You could ask why it can be tricky to talk about. Remind the group of Adam and Eve before the fall - they were naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2). Sex is God's good gift for marriage and part of celebrating God's design of marriage is being able to talk about that appropriately.

Stanley Grenz, in his book *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, says that sex in marriage is “a visible expression and symbolic sealing of the marriage bond uniting husband and wife.” It is the most intimate of all relationships – where husband and wife can give themselves fully and freely, emotionally, spiritually and physically to each other for mutual enjoyment and benefit, knowing they will be accepted, cared for and valued.

What parallels can you see between the relationship of a man and a woman in marriage, and the relationship between Christ and his church? Can you describe this relationship in a single word?

What does the intimacy of the marriage relationship, in terms of both companionship and sex, reflect about God, his character and his love for his people?

Direct the discussion here to being truly known and loved by another and way a couple can partially reflect the boundless love God demonstrates towards his people.

The Bible also has a great deal to say about sex outside of marriage.

What do the following verses tell us about how God views sex outside of marriage? What are the consequences of living outside God's plan for sexual relationships?

Genesis 34:1-7

Exodus 20:14

Leviticus 18:1-30

Romans 1:26-27

Sexual sin, like all sin, is serious. It's serious because sexual sin violates the 'one flesh' nature of marriage and steps outside of the purposes for which God gave marriage and sex.

The verses below give Christians good reason to flee from sexual sin. What are they?

Colossians 3:5-10

I Thessalonians 4:3-5

If the group found it easier to talk about the boundaries God has set around sexual behaviour than they did about the freedom and beauty of sexual expression within marriage, it might be worth mentioning that and exploring why that is the case.

Thinking it through

“Hook ups and sexual friendships can be dignified and ethical when indulged in sparingly, with mutual respect, with protection and not for the sake of being cool or keeping up.”

– Lisa Pryor, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2007) in support of teenagers’ freedom for sexual activity.

What are her assumptions about sex in human relationships? How does the Bible help us respond to them?

Some Christians encourage young Christian couples to marry quickly to avoid sexual sin. Yet Ignatius, one of the early Christian teachers, wrote this:

“Marriage is God’s good gift to men and women ... encourage husbands and wives not to enter marriage simply as a means of satisfying their sexual appetites, but with a consciousness of God’s command to love and sacrifice for each other. Each marriage is ultimately for the honour of God.”

- Ignatius (d. ~ AD107), *Letter to Polycarp*

What do you think is the better advice?

Marriage is about so much more than appropriate sexual expression. It might be worth asking how married Christians can model that to younger Christians.

Reflecting and Applying

In your group, discuss some of the following questions and issues:

We have seen that the primary picture of marriage in the Bible is one of a husband and wife standing before God, knowing each other, working together and supporting one another. This can be hard when life gets busy and there are multiple demands on a couple's time. What are some practices that help husbands and wives to live in their marriage?

How can we model and promote a full and rich view of Christian marriage which avoids the error of presenting God's view of sex as rule-bound and limiting?

Praying

Spend some time thinking about how this study is relevant to your context.

How does this information speak to:

- Married couples?
- Engaged couples?
- Single people?
- Divorced people?

How can we encourage our young people to value God's view of sex and marriage when it is so counter cultural?

Talk through the issues raised and pray together.

Resources for further reading

Marriage Matters, a resource paper from the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the PCNSW. Available on the Committee website: gsandc.org.au (12 pages, general readership)

Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* (Crossway, 2013) (272 pages, good theological insight, general readership, but particularly useful for pastors)

Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Christian Lover: The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers* (Reformation Trust, 2009) (100 pages, an anthology of writings from Christian couples across history, general readership)

Kevin Leman, *Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Tyndale House) (256 pages, general readership, straightforward answers to blunt questions)

Tony Payne & Phillip Jensen, *Pure Sex* (Matthias Media, 1998) (136 pages, Australian authors, general readership)

Patricia Weerakoon, *The Best Sex for Life* (Anglican Press Australia, 2013) (244 pages, Australian author, written for married couples, or those planning to marry)

Study #3

Marriage for children, family and society

The **aim** of Study 3 is to show that marriage is God's foundation for a Godly, growing society.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

- Deuteronomy 6:5-7

In the first two studies we established that marriage is a gift from God, a beautiful gift designed by him. We looked at the purposes of marriage including companionship and sexual expression, and we considered how we can strive for marriages which reflect the rich and full nature of God's design.

In this study, we turn to another purpose of marriage – children!

From the very beginning God's purpose was that the human family would grow (Genesis 1:27-28, 9:1). So God has designed sex within marriage as both an intimate expression of love, and also for procreation. He planned that children would be born to a husband and wife who are one flesh, united for life. How do the following passages reflect God's plan for marriage and children?

Psalm 127:3-5

Psalm 128:1-4

From the studies so far, we know that God's plan for family begins with a man and a woman leaving their families to enter into a marriage covenant voluntarily, for life, excluding all others. This is the beginning of a new family. God has designed the family unit as the best place in which to raise children.

What do the following verses show us about God's plan for families?

Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:1-9

Psalms 78:4

Proverbs 1:8-9

Ephesians 6:4

The group should look up the first 4 passages here. If time is an issue, assign each verse to one or two people and ask them to report back to the group.

If you have time and a group which would like to think through this issue a little more deeply, look at the Malachi passage as well.

For further thought: what does this passage say about the influence of faithful parents on the next generation of God's people?

Malachi 2:15

This is an in depth question. If the group reads this passage, guide the discussion with questions such as: How are the people of Israel treating each other? How is God treating them? How does God want families among his people to reflect his faithfulness? Godly offspring are a result of both vertical and horizontal faithfulness.

Part of God's purpose for marriage is to be a basis for a family where children may grow and mature. Human culture continues and develops through successive generations of children. As Christians, we have an impact on our culture, and benefit society through raising Godly families.

What do these passages show us about the ways in which God uses families to grow his kingdom and benefit society?

Genesis 12:1-3

It would be good for all of the group to look up each passage here.

Joshua 24:14-15 (*note that when Joshua says "house", he means family*)

Jeremiah 29:4-7

Remind the group of who Timothy was: Paul's trusted companion and co-worker, who was taught the faith by his mother, Eunice and grandmother, Lois.

2 Timothy 3:14-15

God includes families in his mission, and blesses the world through families. This culminates in the incarnation of Jesus – born as a child into a family with a genealogy stretching back to Abraham, he brings the ultimate blessing to God's people (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1, Luke 3). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin because our redemption had to come from God, not us. Yet God chose to work through a human family.

Where else in the Bible do we see families playing a role in God's plan for salvation?

The debate about redefining marriage inevitably leads to a discussion about raising children. The biblical pattern is that families consist of a mother, a father and their children. Mothers and fathers generally relate differently to their children, and influence the development of them in different ways as they grow up. This is God's good design.

What do the following verses have to say about the relationships between mothers, fathers and children?

Proverbs 1:8-9

Here again, divide these passages among the group rather than the entire group reading through every passage.

Proverbs 13:24

Proverbs 31:27-29

Colossians 3:20-21

1 Timothy 3:4-5

Children are a blessing to a marriage, but they don't make a marriage.

Not all marriages are blessed with children. There are several couples in the Bible who were unable to have children: Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 30:1), Hannah and Elkanah (1 Samuel 1), Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1). For each of them God intervened - the stories show that God is sovereign over the shape of our families. There's no promise that all couples will be able to have children. Each of the stories above acknowledge this, recognising the grief and pain experienced by couples who are unable to have children.

Thinking about what we have learnt about marriage so far, and also about God's plan for humanity, how can we better walk with and support couples struggling with infertility?

This is a sensitive area for many couples who are unable to have children. Think about who is in your group and how the issue of children and marriage may touch them.

It may be helpful for the group to look up some of the passages mentioned above to understand more about how the Bible presents the issue.

There may be people in your group who do not understand the grief and pain associated with childlessness, and who might speak too quickly or too easily. Be ready for this, and gently ensure that conversation is loving and sensitive.

On the next page, there is a question about the appropriateness of a couple deliberately choosing not to have children.. This may generate robust discussion. The general Biblical pattern is that marriages produce children, but there may be instances where, for medical or psychological reasons, a couple chooses not to have children. A couple making this decision would be responsible for ensuring that they were not making the decision selfishly by prioritising their own lifestyle over raising children.

Reflecting and Applying

Discuss some of the following issues with your group.

Is it OK for a Christian married couple to decide not to have children when, as far as they know, they are physically able to?

There is an African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child”. How can a church support families - whether in the church or in the wider community - who are raising children?

Thinking it through

The Marriage service of the Presbyterian Church of Australia includes these words:

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly or carelessly but with reverent and serious consideration of the purposes for which it has been given.

It was given so that husband and wife might always enjoy each others companionship, help and support.

It was given for the proper expression of human sexuality.

It was given so that family life might continue and that children might be brought up in the love and security of a stable and happy home.

It was given so that human society might be healthy and have a firm foundation.



Look back over the three studies. What are the key elements of God's view of marriage? How are they different from common views in our society?

The biblical view of marriage is not always popular in our society. Non-Christians don't always understand what's different about God's plan for marriage, and why it's important. How would you explain God's view of marriage to a non-Christian?

Praying

Spend time with your group praying for:

Mums and Dads who are striving to raise Godly children.

Couples struggling with infertility.

Single parents raising children.

Children who are not being raised in the security of a happy and stable family.

Resources for further reading

Marriage Matters, a resource paper of the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the PCNSW. Available on the Committee website: gsandc.org.au (12 pages, general readership)

Failing Infertility, a resource paper of the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the PCNSW. Available on the Committee website: gsandc.org.au (11 pages, general readership, particularly helpful for couples planning families)

Fleur Letcher, *Who Do We Think We Are?* Why biological links matter and why society should care (<http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/who-do-we-think-we-are/17821>) (engages with questions about the shape of families in the context of the debate about same sex marriage)

Stuart Heath Tim Adeney, *Family*, (Gospel Groundworks). (A series of studies about marriage and parenting, available in print or for e-readers)

Andreas Kostenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Crossway, 2010) (400 pages, a more academic work, of particular usefulness for pastors)

Study #4

Marriage - the difficult issues

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

- Romans 8:22-21

In the first three studies, we looked at God’s pattern and purposes for marriage. We saw that marriage is a gift from God to us, a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman. Marriage is designed to give companionship, and the enjoyment of sexual unity, and to create families in which children can flourish.

We know, though, that relationships between men and women don’t always work out according to this pattern.

Firstly, not everyone marries, and even those who do may spend many years of their lives as unmarried people. For some people singleness is deliberate choice (perhaps to serve God, see 1 Cor 7), but for others it is a source of unplanned heartache.

Secondly, we live in a world that is marred by the effects of sin - both of the Fall in general, and of humans specifically. We understand marriage in the context of God’s “big picture” - the Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation framework. God’s perfect Creation is affected by sin (the Fall), but is redeemed by Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection. We live in a “now but, not yet” time, in which all Creation has been redeemed by Christ’s work, but the final effect of this (the New Creation) will not be fully



experienced until Christ returns in glory.

So, while we can know, from the Bible, God's perfect pattern for marriage, we see in the world around us that marriages are still impacted by sin.

Some couples turn their marriage into an idol and forget to find their value and identity in Christ. Some marriages display an abuse of power rather than loving, Christlike leadership and submission. Even great marriages involve two sinners, and so can experience hard times. Some marriages fail.

A Biblical understanding of marriage helps us think about these difficult issues. How do we care for and love couples who are experiencing difficulties in their marriage? How do we love both the victim and the perpetrator in situations of violence or abuse? How can we value singleness and celebrate it as we celebrate marriage?

Some of these questions can be tricky to think through, and may reach into pastorally sensitive areas.

As we look at these questions, we need to be sensitive to one another. These are complex and sensitive issues, and we will only deal with them briefly here. It may be that these studies raise some issues that it would be wise to follow up with your minister, elder, or a mature Christian friend. If this is the case, please make sure that you seek their counsel.

The **aim** of Study 4 is to provide material for your group to use in exploring some tricky issues. Each of these issues could constitute a single study. Spend time talking with your group about which issues they are interested in and would like to explore. You can then decide which topics to look at and how best to explore them - you could do each over several weeks, or choose to focus on only one or two.

In the introduction, the Creation - Fall - Redemption - New Creation framework is mentioned. The group may be familiar with this framework, but it would be good to make sure of that and to point out how it is reflected in the Romans 8 reading at the top of the study.

Looking at these issues may raise sensitive and serious issues for members of your group. Try to be aware of potential concerns, and make sure the group is a safe space before discussing these issues. If issues do come up, make sure the people involved are followed up appropriately.

Singleness

Not everyone is called to be married. Some are called to lifelong singleness. The Bible speaks to single people too – remember Jesus and Paul were both single (1 Corinthians 7:7 and 9:3)!

What does the following passage tell us about singleness?

1 Corinthians 7:8, 32-35

There is a tension in 1 Corinthians 7. In verse 8 Paul advocates staying single, and in verse 20 teaches that a Christian should stay in the situation they were in when God called them, but in verse 28 he says that marrying is not sinning. The crisis he mentions in verse 26 may have been a time of persecution and suffering the church is facing. So Paul advises that there are reasons for Christians to remain single, but that it is not wrong for a Christian to marry.

In Australian culture, and also in church culture, single people often feel left out and overlooked. What contributes to this?

How can we individually and corporately think, act and speak in a way that shows we value and celebrate singleness?

How can we ensure that single people feel at home, loved, known and cared for in our churches?



In 1 Corinthians 7:17, Paul gives us a guiding principle about how we are to live as Christians. In the middle of a passage addressing marriage, singleness and status, Paul writes that, *“each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.”* (NIV 2011)

Does this mean a single person cannot one day get married?
(see 1 Corinthians 7:8, 25-28, 39)

What guidance does the passage give for single people and married people?

Submission

God's plan for marriages is that husbands lead lovingly and wives submit lovingly (Ephesians 5:21-33). This is a real challenge for married couples, because the idea of submission flies in the face of what our society accepts.

Australian culture is individualistic and egalitarian. We take pride in our lack of submission to all forms of authority. Bushrangers, who defied local authorities and the law, are remembered as heroes. Pitch invaders at sporting events are cheered while the security personnel who chase them are booed. Submission, in our culture, is a dirty word.

But Christians are counter-cultural. Understanding what God has done for us, and seeking to live for him, necessarily means that we will be out of step with our culture. It's because of this that Christians need to understand submission in the context of the bond between Christ and his church.

There are several examples of submission throughout the Bible. Mutual submission should be the standard for the way we relate to one another but husbands and wives are called to relate to each other in a particular way within marriage.

Read the following verses and explain what they show about submission.

James 4:7

Matthew 26:39

Ephesians 5:21-24

Hebrews 13:17



Read the following verses to see what they say about the relationship of husband and wife.

Colossians 3:18

Ephesians 5:22-24

1 Peter 3:5

Taken together, what can we say about the way marriage provides for the needs of each person in the couple?

Think of your own marriage, or of the Christian marriages you see around you. How do the husbands model Christlike leadership to their wife and family? How do the wives demonstrate Godly submission toward their own husbands? When have you seen this dynamic go wrong? What were the consequences?

Some commentators have claimed that the Biblical teaching on submission can be used by a husband to justify harsh – even violent – leadership of his wife. How do the Bible passages we’ve read in this study show this attitude is a serious distortion of the Biblical picture.

If someone said to you, “I can’t believe that in this day and age you expect a wife to submit to her husband!”, how would you respond?

Domestic Violence

Domestic and Family violence can be defined as actions which involve violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by a partner, carer or family member to control, dominate or instil fear, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial or other types of abuse.

Domestic violence is a serious issue. Reports of women and children being harmed, or even killed, as a result of domestic violence make the news almost daily. Eighty-nine women were killed by their current or former partner between 2008-10. This equates to nearly one woman every week. While domestic violence can be directed towards men, it is more often directed toward women. Often, victims find it difficult to let people know that it is happening to them.

In 2015 the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW made a statement on Domestic Violence. This is available online at <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Domestic-Violence-Statement-July-2015.pdf>

These studies have looked at the pattern God has put in place for the relationship between a husband and a wife. What Bible verses would you use to show that abuse in any form is a distortion of God's picture of marriage?

How can we create a culture in our churches that helps and supports victims as well as repentant perpetrators of domestic violence?

Divorce

Human marriages fail and God has graciously made provision for these situations. Polygamy was never God's intention, but there are regulations for it in the Old Testament as it was a cultural practice (see Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Likewise, divorce was not God's pattern, but Jesus talks about it. In Australia today, polygamy among Christians is almost non-existent - divorce and remarriage are the bigger issues.

There are several positions that Christians have taken on divorce and remarriage. The Roman Catholic/sacramental view is that remarriage after divorce is not allowed, since it is a holy bond which cannot be reconstituted with someone else. Hence the Roman Catholic church will sometimes "annul" a marriage (that is, declare that the marriage was invalid from the beginning).

The traditional Reformed view is that divorce is possible if one spouse has broken the marriage covenant by sexual sin or desertion. The other spouse is then free to remarry. More recently, many churches have added abuse as grounds for a valid divorce. Another view is that divorce, however arrived at, ends a marriage and frees a divorced person to remarry, though it would be important for the person to think about how they have contributed to the divorce.

Read the following passages and explain how they help us understand divorce and remarriage.

Malachi 2:16

Matthew 5:31-32



Matthew 19:1-10

Romans 7:2-3

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

Hebrews 13:4

When a marriage ends, great pain is experienced by everyone involved, and the ramifications are widespread. How can we as God's people, both individually and corporately, support and show love to those walking the path of divorce?



Thinking it through

God's plan for marriage is that it be life long. Christians entering into marriage need to take that seriously, and Christians struggling in their marriage should seek to repair their marriage in the first instance rather than immediately heading to divorce. There are, however, times when mending a broken marriage is not possible. Discuss with your group the sorts of situations that exist where you would counsel someone to leave a broken marriage.

Because divorce exists, the possibility of remarriage exists. The verses we have looked at during the study mention remarriage in some contexts. With your group, discuss what you understand the Bible to say about remarriage.



Reflecting and Applying

What are some practical actions that you could take to encourage Christians around you in their current situation? Think about ways to help those who are married and those who are single. Think about those for whom things appear to be going well, and those who are struggling.

How can our churches encourage open, yet sensitive, discussion on things that go wrong within marriages?

Praying

Spend some time with your group praying through the issues raised in this study. Pray particularly for those struggling in their marriages, with singleness, with infertility and for their friends and churches as they support and care for them.

Resources

**Jericho Road (Presbyterian Social Services)
Counselling Service**

www.jerichoroad.org.au/pres-counselling-service/

Domesticviolence.com.au

**National Sexual Assault Domestic & Family Violence
Counselling Service**

www.1800respect.org.au

1800 737 732

Mensline Australia

www.menslineaus.org.au

1800 789 978

Domestic Violence Help Line

1800 656 463

Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Crossway, 2010) (288 pages, written particularly for married couples)

Marriage God's Way is a much needed resource at a time when our understanding of marriage and gender is undergoing radical re-definition. Not only do the studies provide a safe and pastorally sensitive forum for discussion, they are also uncompromisingly founded in God's word, the Bible. I look forward to using Marriage God's Way in Bible study groups, with teenagers and one to one with other women. It's my hope that these studies will also be used as a resource to help non-Christian friends understand God's view on marriage.

Carmelina Read,
Chatswood Presbyterian Church;
Dean of Women, Christ College

In our society, marriage has undergone decades of deconstruction: From the sexual revolution of the 1960's, to the proliferation of de facto relationships and easy divorce laws. And now, the latest, the concerted effort to redefine marriage out of existence. This is a time for Christians to think clearly, from the Bible about marriage. Marriage God's Way is a great resource to help us to do that.

Sandy Macmillan,
Senior Minister, Drummoyne Presbyterian Church

These studies present a clear biblical foundation for marriage in a refreshing, sensitive and thought provoking way. They will help you see the practical outworking of the Scriptures in your life and in the church community. I really appreciated that they tackle some of the real and difficult issues of divorce, abuse, childlessness, remarriage very sensitively and respectfully (something I don't usually find in Bible studies, so thank you!).

Chris Quirk,
Blacktown East Presbyterian Church;
Visiting Lecturer, SMBC

