

CHAPTER EIGHT

RICH TOWARD MARRIAGE

→ **Strategy:** The rich single life embraces a biblical vision for marriage with sober but faith-filled anticipation.

A friend of mine, a pastor, was a guest at the wedding of one of his nieces, whom he did not know very well. Because weddings, for him, often involve carrying some degree of responsibility, he was more than happy to be just a spectator on this occasion. He was enjoying himself so much he didn't even realize the start of the ceremony was now long overdue. Suddenly there came a tap on his shoulder. Turning around, he saw his tuxedoed brother, the father of the bride. This could only mean trouble.

I Do What???

In a brief huddle at the back of the church, my friend learned the officiating clergy had failed to show, so he had been nominated as Emergency Clergy in Relief. OK, he could handle this. The first order of business, of course, was to have the bride and groom fill him in on what kind of service this was supposed to be. After a few moments of conversation with the somewhat jittery couple, however, he came to an unnerving conclusion—*THEY had no idea what kind of service this was supposed to be, either!*

This bride and groom had gotten to the very threshold of the most important decision of their lives, planned an expensive ceremony and reception, invited hundreds of guests, but had somehow never gotten around to asking, "What are we supposed to do when we get there?" When Mr. Emergency Clergy in Relief, probing a little further, asked the couple if they were (at least) ready to say their vows, they replied, "Isn't that what YOU do? Why don't you just say some things and then we'll do the 'I do' part. That should be good enough."

Do you look forward to the day when you will do the "I do' part"? What exactly will you be agreeing to "I do" on that momentous day? In this chapter we're going to try something tricky. We're going to look at the idea of mar-

riage in a way that, I hope, will both sober and envision you to prepare yourself for the day when the great “I do” tumbles out of your mouth.

What Ever Happened to Happily Ever After?

Meditate on Hebrews 13:4. In what ways does our society dishonor marriage today?

First, let’s affirm that we can no longer look to our culture for any clues regarding either the definition of a good marriage, or how to have one. One young woman summed up the marriage lessons she has absorbed from her parents’ generation: “They now say that the first marriage is for love, the second is for money, and the third is for sex.”¹

This isn’t to say Americans don’t know how to throw a great wedding—the *average* cost of a wedding in the United States these days is just under \$20,000! Folks are also bringing considerable creativity into their wedding plans. Skydiving weddings, scuba-diving weddings, and other oddities have become almost commonplace. Disney World has even gotten in on the deal, offering the “Ultimate Fairy Tale Wedding,” which includes a Cinderella gown and glass coach for the princess/bride, a white horse for the prince/groom, an exclusive party in the Magic Kingdom, and the wedding night in a honeymoon castle. All this at the bargain price of \$100,000.

And what of the enchanted couples enjoying such fairy-tale experiences? Unless they have something more unifying than a lot of spare cash, chances are that only about half will be able to live “happily ever after.”

It’s not that people don’t want marriage to work. The number of marriage counselors jumped from 1,000 in 1972 to more than 50,000 in 1998, yet divorce rates have

not changed significantly in years. Marriage failure is now seen as a normal part of American life. A nationwide poll in the early 1990s showed that almost 60 percent believed it was best to draw up a prenuptial agreement²—in

“ Marriage, it has been said, is like a besieged fortress. Everyone inside wants to get out, and everyone outside wants to get in.³

— **Ruthe Stein**

effect, a kind of a cross between a life insurance policy and a will, so if the marriage dies we can minimize all that unpleasant squabbling as we divide the spoils.

Let’s face it. As a culture, we have become experts at weddings and failures at marriage.

I wish I could say God's church is a beacon of light in this confusion, but it is not. The failure rate of Christian marriages lags just barely behind that of the overall population. It appears many professing Christians have a very non-Christian view of marriage. I regularly get calls from people outside our church who want me to perform a Christian wedding ceremony but have no awareness of the basic biblical teaching on marriage. A guy once called me and said he needed me to perform a ceremony in two weeks. He said he and his fiancée were Christians. I told him I couldn't do it unless I was confident this marriage was being established on a biblical basis and I suggested that I meet with them first. He replied, "I'm sorry, I'd love to do things according to the Bible, but I've got all my relatives coming into town for a reunion, and it's cheaper to do it then than for us to wait and have them come back later." I hope it was a good reunion.

For most single people, marriage is at least a dream, and for some it is becoming a fast-approaching reality. For those who dream, a good dose of biblical reality will help you dream with purpose. For those who are in relationships where marriage is a real possibility, I'd like to help you think beyond dresses, guest lists, and china patterns. For those who have experienced the pain of divorce, an understanding of God's perspective on marriage may help you sort out the past and view the future with renewed hope and wisdom. So let's examine together the biblical view of marriage.

At the Heart: A Covenant

The Bible, both in its precepts and examples, has a great deal to say about marriage. Perhaps the most concentrated teaching on marriage is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul addresses marriage in the middle of a discussion on the life of the church. If you haven't pondered this passage recently, take a moment to do so now.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with

Meditate on Proverbs

21:5. What kind of problems could be caused by a hasty decision to marry?

For Further Study:

Read Hebrews 8:6-13. What differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant do you find in this passage?

water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Eph 5:21-33).

For Further Study:

Read Hebrews 13:20-21. How do we know that the New Covenant has power to help us please God in marriage or any other work we are called to do?

There is a lot of rich, practical truth to be drawn from this passage, but don’t miss the underlying theology. The institution of marriage is rooted in a deeper institution: the New Covenant of Christ with his body, the Church.

The theology of marriage is a covenant theology. In Chapter Seven we discussed the covenantal aspect of relationships. Covenant is the binding promise of fidelity at the heart of Christian marriage. Jesus’ covenant with us allows us to enter into a meaningful marriage covenant with another: “We love because he first loved us” (1Jn 4:19). All the elements of a biblical marriage—roles and responsibilities, communication and conflict resolution, romance and intimacy, parenting, etc.—flow out of an understanding of covenant and are empowered by the grace that flows to us through our covenantal position as God’s beloved children.

“ Marriage is the most vulnerable state of human existence. Here is where we have the most to lose. Here is where we are absolutely open. Here commitment means everything.... ‘How do I know when I am deeply enough in love to get married?’ ... ‘When you love that person enough to publicly commit yourself to him or her for the rest of your life.’⁴

”
— R.C. Sproul

Covenant is at the heart of marriage, and wedding vows are at the heart of the marriage covenant. The only reason to even have a wedding ceremony is to commit yourselves to one another under God through vows. There is nothing symbolic or ceremonial about covenant vows. They must be taken seriously.

In the Bible we see a remarkable thing. People experience the great provision and kindness of God. Out of thankfulness they turn to him in praise and adoration.

For Further Study:

Read Genesis 28:10-22. What caused Jacob to make his vow at Bethel?

Meditate on Deuteronomy 23:21-

23. Why are vows to God treated so seriously in the Bible?

Out of this heartfelt worship come great vows of commitment and sanctification. In the Bible people are warned never to vow lightly and never to vow what they cannot fulfill (Ecc 5:4-5).

Vows are an expression of ultimate trust. They are not conditional promises: "I'll do this *if* you do that." A marriage vow is unilateral. It says, "I commit my life to this marriage and renounce my right to take my life back." Marriage is not a negotiated partnership—it is a total commitment of myself to another for the duration of my life. Many single men and women will perform the ritual of the wedding vow this year. I suppose nearly every person vowing marriage commitment sincerely desires to make it work. But as we know, statistics indicate half will fail to follow it through to the end.

You see, vows are not a wish list of what we would like to take place in our marriage. Nor are they the mumbo-jumbo of religious formality. Covenant vows are the blueprint that determines how a Christian marriage will be built. We should be willing to evaluate our marriage based on our vows, and have our contribution to the marriage evaluated by our vows. Marriage vows are unnervingly practical.

1 Which of the following promises would be good for wedding vows and which wouldn't?

Good	Not Good
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> "I promise to be truthful to you"
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> "I promise to always think of you first"
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> "I promise to be what you want me to be"
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> "I promise to be your best friend"
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> "I promise you'll never have a cat"

Most of the couples I marry write their own vows, and I always insist they allow me to review their vows prior to the wedding. I do this to assure myself and them of two things: that the vows are consistent with biblical teaching on marriage, *and* that they can actually be kept. Don't vow "I will never be angry with you," because you'll probably break that one during the reception. "I will never leave you," however, is a perfectly "keepable" vow, and one all couples should include. The wise single man or woman will give thought to what he or she will vow *before* getting to the altar.

Beyond covenant vows, the biblical theology of a marriage covenant has several other very practical implications. Let's take a look at a few that are rooted in the passage from Ephesians quoted at page 121-122.

Meditate on Proverbs

20:25. How can you keep from being rash in what you dedicate yourself to?

THE GIFT OF SINGLENES: A GIFT FOR THE AGES

Most of you reading this book will one day be married. But if you think your true contribution can't be made *unless* you are married, let me introduce you to some folks who lived their lives in the gift of singleness with great purpose and impact.

Do you believe there is a limit to how God can use you in ministry? If so, think of Francis Asbury, founder of American Methodism; Phillips Brooks, the best-known American preacher of the early 1900s; J. Gresham Machen, founder of Westminster Seminary; or Kenneth Scott Latourette, one of the greatest church historians of this century. How about Corrie Ten Boom? How about Audrey Wetherell Johnson, pioneer in modern personal devotional literature and founder of the Bible Study Fellowship; or Henrietta Mears, shaper of modern Christian education and a woman who had a thriving outreach to Hollywood show-business types! Don't forget C. S. Lewis, a single man for all but a few years of his long life. We wouldn't have *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Mere Christianity* if this "confirmed bachelor" hadn't made such good use of his singleness.

Singles have always been at the forefront of the spread of the gospel. The first modern missionary, David Brainerd, was a single man who evangelized the Indians of New England in the 1700s. His diary inspired another great early missionary, single man Henry Martyn of England. The early 20th century was a time when the gospel was expanding into new lands at an unprecedented pace. In 1900 alone, Elanor Chestnut and Lottie Moon were serving in China, Mary Slessor was working in the villages of Africa, and Amy Carmichael was beginning to rescue girls from temple prostitution in the slums of India. They would be followed by Gladys Aylward, whose missionary heroism in China was chronicled in the film "The Inn of Sixth Happiness." All were single women.

"Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" (the simplest song of Christian worship) and "The Messiah" (the most majestic) were both written by life-long singles: Anna Barlett Warner wrote the former, while George Friedrich Handel penned his immortal "Messiah" in an inspired three weeks. Other singles who have contributed to the rich worship tradition of the church include Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane ("Beneath the Cross of Jesus"); Adelaide Addison Pollard ("Have Thine Own Way"); Frances Havergal ("Take My Life and Let it Be"); and George Matheson ("O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"). And of course single man Isaac Watts' pen contributed more than 600 hymns to the church.

R.C. Sproul lists four men whom he considers, after the Apostle Paul, the most important Christian theologians: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Being celibate priests, Augustine and Aquinas never married; Luther married at age 42; and Calvin was married just ten years before being widowed. As single men, these pillars of the church were used by God to shape not only the church but the history of the Western world.

The gift of singleness is not just a gift to the individual believer, it is a gift to the body of Christ, and always has been.

Want to See My Wedding Pictures?

Who is the most influential person at a wedding? The bride? The groom? The mom? In my experience it is often the photographer. People pay a great deal of money to

“ Marriage is an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving of parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supportive partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children.⁵

— John Stott

have a stranger intrude on their every intimate wedding moment, posing people like fruit in a still-life, all in the name of “preserving the memory of this day.” When people tell you that on your wedding day you are treated like royalty, don’t forget that the privilege includes being hounded by paparazzi.

The photos, of course, are a great keepsake that will be

treasured always. But what I’m leading up to here is the fact that marriage is itself a picture with the most profound and eternal implications. I refer to the picture you will show people *through* your marriage. For marriage is, as one commentator put it, “The highest earthly type [picture] of the grandest heavenly fact—namely, the mystical union of the eternal Word with his Bride, the Church.”⁶

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph 5:31-32). Paul’s astounding claim is that marriage is for even greater things than companionship, family, heritage, or social stability. The greatest, grandest reason for marriage between man and woman is to display the eternal relationship between Christ and his Church!

How does this happen? It’s no accident Paul quotes directly from Genesis 2:24, where God joins the first man and woman together. By quoting the Genesis passage, Paul is letting us know that *before sin even entered the world* God had a plan of salvation. It involved his Son coming in the flesh and gathering together a people to be his “Bride,” Christ redeeming the unlovely through his own death so they might be beautiful companions throughout eternity. In Revelation 19:7-9 we actually get a preview of the greatest wedding video of all time—the marriage celebration of the Lamb of God to his pure and spotless Bride, the Church.

Marriage then, is not merely about romantic history.

For Further Study:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18.
Why does the Bible prohibit Christians from marrying non-Christians?

For Further Study:

Read Matthew 22:1-14. What does the parable of the wedding feast tell us about who will be in attendance at the marriage supper of the Lamb?

More importantly, it is about redemptive history. That is why the writer of Hebrews commands us that “Marriage should be honored by all” (Heb 13:4). Any adulteration of the biblical view of marriage distorts the redemptive picture God has developed. A marriage that conforms to the biblical pattern God has set will actually testify to the greater reality of God’s love for his people. I don’t know about you, but for me this goes way beyond mystery—this is entering brain-frying realms.

Biblical teaching establishes an order for marriage that is not arbitrary, but very purposeful—marriage is meant to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church. This biblical order determines the way we approach the role of husband or wife in a marriage. There is much controversy about the issues of headship and submission in the church today, and there is no way I can adequately address all the issues involved in this discussion. The recommended resources at the end of this chapter can help you sort out the issues. Perhaps an illustration, however, will help shed light on the wisdom of God’s order for roles in a marriage.

“ Headship is the divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home. Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help to carry it through according to her gifts.⁷

— John Piper

Jill and I wanted to have ballroom dancing at our wedding reception. Since we were going to be on display, we thought we had better learn some steps in advance. We soon found that ballroom dancing is the ultimate team endeavor. Good ballroom dancers function in sync, and almost seem to be moving as one—not because

they held a strategy session beforehand, but because inherent in the dance are defined roles: leading for the man, following for the woman. All the man’s steps are leading steps; all the woman’s steps are following steps.

We were cool with the program in theory, but soon discovered a problem. While Jill was picking things up easily, I danced more like Fred Flintstone than Fred Astaire. I had so much trouble with the steps and counts I couldn’t even begin to think about leading Jill. The obvious solution, I thought, was to let Jill take up the slack and lead until I got my dancing shoes working. But (besides being scolded mercilessly by the dance instructor) Jill’s efforts to lead created major train wrecks. Her steps aren’t designed as leading steps and mine are not following steps. Instead of an elegant picture of perfectly synchronized artistic

For Further Study:

Read 1 Peter 2:25-3:7. What is one reason wives should exercise submission to their husbands? What is one reason husbands should respect their wives?

2 Write a one-sentence definition for the following terms:

Headship:

Submission:

expression, the best we could muster was a fitful and contentious shuffle around the fringe of the dance floor.

In some ways, ballroom dancing is a lot like marriage. Both have an order that cannot be compromised. Unless you just don't care about the results, each person must understand his or her roles and responsibilities and

embrace them gracefully. When done well, the man's leadership allows the woman's beauty and unique gifts to flow freely. In turn, the woman's submission allows the man to set a pace and direction appropriate for the couple and the environment. Ballroom dancing, like marriage, is meant to display more than the sum of its parts. The beauty is in the teamwork, not the talent.

Jill and I deeply appreciate the roles God has given us

“ I acknowledge the kind hand of the heavenly Father. In changing my name, he has allowed me to take the name of one who loves the cause of Christ, and makes the promotion of it the business of my life. One who is, in every respect, the most calculated to make me happy and useful, of all the persons I have ever seen.”

— Ann Hasseltine Judson,
first American woman missionary,
speaking of her husband

in our marriage. I am not naturally a take-charge guy, and can be passive in decision-making. Jill is very capable of leading in many areas, but would tend to be impulsive in her decisions. If we built our marriage according to our natural strengths and preferences, her assertiveness and my tendency to avoid responsibility would create constant battles. But, by God's grace,

I have embraced my leadership responsibility and she has taken up a vision for submission. As a result, I have grown in making decisions, and Jill enjoys the freedom to express her initiative without fearing the consequences of ill-considered actions. We share the goal of presenting a clear and attractive view of marriage to the world, and it takes both of us functioning gladly in our God-ordained roles for that to happen.

I don't know of anyone who can think about marriage roles without experiencing some degree of apprehension. Certainly there are abuses in the way people have applied this important biblical teaching. But just remember: if your Father in heaven has called you to reflect the joy of redemption through the prism of marriage, he will divinely enable you to fulfill your role. And don't forget to enjoy the dance.

Meditate on

1 Timothy 3:1-13. Why is the marriage of a Christian leader so important?

Meditate on Genesis 2:18-25. In what ways did God establish marriage as the closest of human relationships?

To Form a More Perfect Union

In Ephesians 5:31, Paul presents the two main steps of entering into a marriage relationship—we *leave* one state of life, and become *united* to another person for life. Let's examine these steps a little further.

For many single people, the idea of leaving home to get married just doesn't apply. If you haven't been under direct parental supervision for years, what is there to leave? But in this passage, the idea of leaving applies to far more than parents and a childhood home. Anyone who has lived the single life knows you develop some pretty strong habits. There is no one to tell you where to put your keys (or to get on your case when you can't find them). No one will be irritated when you're an hour late getting home. No one cares how bad you look when you get up in the morning, or even how long you stay that way.

But "leaving," as Paul uses the word, is not exclusively an issue of authority relationships, or even of geography. It's an issue of your heart and your habits. Marriage

means leaving certain things at the altar. Forever.

In marriage, *I leave* my tendency to walk away from unresolved conflict. *I leave* the influence of those things and people that would pull me away from my beloved. I *leave* expectations that someone else must change for my benefit. *I leave* much of what I have built by myself. Ask most any newly-

wed couple what they left behind at the altar. The list will be long, interesting, and still growing.

The purpose for leaving is to join another person with whom you want to spend the rest of your life (and everyone said, "Amen!"). This is not about housemating. This is about a union—what some Bibles translate "cleaving." Cleaving means not only permanent attachment, but aggressive, ongoing pursuit of another person. Cleaving is where romance finds its appropriate expression in the ongoing wooing of the one to whom God has joined you in marriage. It is also where sanctification—the daily process of putting off sin and growing in holiness, by which we become ever more like Christ—enters the wedding picture. God gave me a wife not just to meet a desire

“ Marriage is death to privacy, independence, childhood's home and family, death to unilateral decisions and the notion that there is only one way of doing things, death to the self. When these little deaths are gladly and wholeheartedly accepted, new life—the glory of sacrificial love which leads to perfect union—is inevitable.⁹ ”

— Elisabeth Elliot

For Further Study:

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. What is the danger of having a marriage where intimacy is not maintained?

Meditate on Luke 20:27-40. How does Jesus' teaching here affect your view of marriage?

but to help me change! Marriage is not simply about combining our strengths, it is about refining our weaknesses. Maybe another illustration will help.

I love to take my family to Colonial Williamsburg, a town that has been meticulously restored to its 18th century character. One of my favorite things to do in Williamsburg is watch the blacksmith. I am fascinated by the patient heating and hammering of raw metal into sturdy and effective tools. These tools are often made from vastly different types of metal. In the hands of a skilled and patient blacksmith, diverse materials can be joined into a seamless unity, creating a tool perfectly suited for its assigned task. The process is called tempering.

For example, to make an ax head, a blacksmith combines the heavy strength of iron with the lighter and more flexible strength of steel to fashion an alloy that can withstand a regular pounding yet retain its sharp edge. Tempering requires an intimate knowledge of the materials being combined, and the skill to blend them in right proportion for maximum effectiveness. In a well-made ax head the heavy portion is entirely iron, providing weight and strength. The blade of the head is entirely steel, for easy sharpening. In the middle the metals are blended into an alloy that cannot separate. If the ax head has too much iron, it will never stay sharp. If it has too much steel it will break. The tempering skill of the blacksmith is crucial.

In any marriage of God's design, an ongoing tempering process takes place. Over time two unique individuals begin to function as one. But the tempering process is not kind to our sinful nature. God puts us with another person who has a unique, innate ability to expose all our carefully hidden sinfulness. A cynic once said, "All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble." In entering into the covenant of

marriage, two single people not only open themselves to the inevitable troubles of a shared life together, they choose to embrace those troubles as good and necessary! They recognize that growth in holiness requires change, and change requires seeing your sinful tendencies, and working in obedience to God to overcome them.

“ I have no doubt that where there is much love there will be much to love, and where love is scant faults will be plentiful. If there is only one good wife in England, I am the man who put the ring on her finger, and long may she wear it! God bless the dear soul! If she can put up with me, she shall never be put down by me.¹⁰

— Charles Spurgeon

Jill and I have seen this tempering process at work in our life together. As you may have gathered, I am a low-gear person; I only go at top speed when necessary. Jill is a high-gear person; she will only down-shift when she has

3 We need to recognize that our spouse may not change easily in certain areas. Which of the following would you find difficult to accommodate in a spouse?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Messiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Driven-ness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moodiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness |

to. In the early years of our marriage, this produced a lot of fender-benders. But as we have grown in our union and dealt with the sin issues underlying our tendencies, we have learned to go at the same pace. Among other things, I am more efficient, and she is more at rest. Our marriage union is becoming a tempered union.

Christian marriage is about spiritual growth—becoming more like Christ. God will not bring you together with someone just to answer your prayers or meet your needs. He brings people together in marriage to edify one another, to give them opportunity to lay down their lives for one another, to build a union designed primarily to bring glory to God. Anything that falls short of union falls short of God's plan. In marriage there can be no reluctant truces, no cold war, no "irreconcilable differences." But for any married couple desiring God's best, the tempering process is an adventure not to be missed.

For Further Study:

Read Malachi 2:13-16. How does the idea of divorce go against God's covenant nature?

Companions for Life

I wouldn't want to leave anyone with the impression that marriage is just slightly better than boot camp. As a pastor of single men and women of God, my greatest joy is to see two people come together in engagement for marriage. Why? Because the Scriptures give such a rich vision for the possibilities of marriage, and because time and again I've seen that vision come true. My own experience has made me the world's greatest booster for marriage.

When I look at my four precious children, I realize the joys I have as a father would not be possible but for my marriage. When I think of who I am as a Christian man, I realize I would be so much less if not for the encouragement and example of my wife's strong faith. When I see how Jill and I have been able to serve together in ministry, I am amazed at the fruit that has emerged from our little partnership. But far more than anything, I am humbly, profoundly, and constantly grateful that God has given me a companion for life.

I realize that for some of you it may not be easy in this

4 Which of the following best describes how parenting fits into your vision for marriage right now?

- I'll marry anybody who'll give me children
- I want the whole package—spouse and kids
- Once I get the marriage thing going, then I'll think about kids
- I'd rather get a cat

**Meditate on
Revelation 19:6-10.**

How often do you ponder the eventual wedding feast of heaven?

“ Love as distinct from ‘being in love’ is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced (in Christian marriages) by the grace which both partners ask, and receive, from God....‘Being in love’ first moved them to promise fidelity; this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it.¹¹ ”

— C.S. Lewis

season of your life to rejoice with me. Some single people I know so idolize the hope of marriage that they believe nothing else can bring fulfillment. Others so fear marriage that they live in virtual denial of the possibility. Some singles seem to careen between the two. Can I offer some counsel? While a few of you will never marry, the great majority will. For most of us the question is not whether we will marry, but will we marry well? Now is the time to prepare yourself to fulfill a

God-given role in your future marriage. It is also the time to place your attention on the Lord and his perfect plan and timing.

Does this sound like contradictory advice? Maybe in one sense it is, but it is sound nonetheless. The same God who says it is a good thing to be single says it is a good thing to desire marriage (1Co 7:8, Pr 18:22). The same God who says “abandon all for the Kingdom” says he will provide all your needs (Mt 6:33). The same God who says “be content in all things” says “make your requests known

to God” (Php 4:4-13). Do you trust him with your desire to be married, or with your fear of marriage? Remember, God is a covenant God. He doesn’t forget his promises or his children. And the God who is the Covenant Maker is also the Covenant Keeper. He will keep that which is entrusted to his care.

I hope this chapter has both sobered your expectations and renewed your zeal for the biblical vision of marriage. This vision is

beautifully captured by the words of an old English Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter. Let me leave you with his perspective, which summarizes all I have just shared in a brilliantly simple way.

The common duty of husband and wife is, entirely to love each other...and avoid all things that tend to

quench your love....Especially to be helpers of each other's salvation: to stir up each other to faith, love, and obedience, and good works: to warn and help each other against sin, and all temptations; to join in God's worship in the family, and in private: to prepare each other for the approach of death, and comfort each other in the hopes of eternal life....To help one another bear their burdens...to be delightful companions in holy love, and heavenly hopes and duties, when all other outward comforts fail.¹² ■

- GROUP DISCUSSION**
1. What would you like to be communicated through your wedding ceremony to those in attendance?
 2. What do you notice most at a wedding or reception?
 3. Suggest some possible reasons why the divorce rate among Christians is almost as high as that of the overall population.
 4. Who has had the greatest impact (positive or negative) on your view of marriage roles? What things do you believe about marriage because of that impact? Are those things true?
 5. As you consider the idea of marriage, what is your greatest fear?
 6. What are some things or habits (or pets) you know you would not be able to bring into a marriage?
 7. What type of person would probably best help you to overcome those areas in which you sin most easily? How does this compare with the type of person you are attracted to?
 8. What is most important to you about a future spouse?
 9. How does your view of marriage affect your life and relationships at present? Are there any ways in which this view plays too important a role?

RECOMMENDED READING *The Intimate Marriage* by R.C. Sproul (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975)

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible by Jay E. Adams (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986)

Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000)

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2. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), p.88.
3. Ruthe Stein, *The Art of Single Living* (New York, NY: Shapolsky Publishers, 1990).
4. R.C. Sproul, *Discovering the Intimate Marriage* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), pp. 120-1.
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7. John Piper, "Perspectives on Family," *CBMW News*, October 1996, p. 13.
8. Vinita Hampton Wright and Mary Horner, *Women's Wisdom Through the Ages* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1994), p. 90.
9. Elisabeth Elliot, *Loneliness* (Nashville, TN: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1988), p. 57.
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11. Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root, eds., *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), p. 412.
12. Quoted by J.I. Packer in *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 1990), p. 263.