

Married on Purpose

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A lot of talk on marriage goes around trying to achieve unity and harmony between husband and wife. We might even speak about the ‘compatibility’ of two individuals, which makes them either a good fit for each other or not. Of course, we may find that, as we consider two people’s personalities, body types, interests, passions or hobbies, they are massively incompatible! Does this mean they shouldn’t get married? Not at all! In fact, if any two people have a passion for Jesus and His Kingdom, could we truly say that they are incompatible in any meaningful sense of the word? So what is important then, if we want to have a meaningful, God-honoring marriage?

The Purpose of Marriage

From the very first marriage, it was always God’s intention that a man and a woman’s purpose on the earth would be what united them in marriage. We see in the beginning when God is creating Adam and Eve, God gave them a mission:

‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”’ (Genesis 1:27-28)

Marriage should give fuller expression to the passion that we have for Christ.

So today, if you are married, or if you are seriously considering it, every person must decide what the purpose of his or her marriage is going to be. Is it going to be about stepping back, looking inward and focusing our attentions on our happiness together as a couple? Or is it going to be about reflecting God and fulfilling His purpose, together? After all, this is the reason why God made humankind and it is why He made marriage.

It is so sad to see how many single people who live out their love for Jesus with such a passion, and

then they get married and lose that same passion. I'll go so far as to say that if you are heading towards marriage with someone and your potential marriage partner is more concerned about living the 'Pinterest lifestyle' than the 'passionate about Jesus lifestyle', rather don't!

Jesus said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* and *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37-40)

Marriage shouldn't change this. Marriage should give fuller expression to the passion that we have for Christ. Jesus' thoughts on marriage are unequivocal. The love we have for one another as husband and wife is a beautiful gift from God, but the love that we have for God runs so much deeper and is so all-consuming, that, comparatively, my feelings for my spouse can hardly be called 'love' at all! (Luke 14:26)

The point of marriage is that we can do more together than we could ever do apart.

The Kingdom of God is supposed to leave its distinctive impression on the shape that our marriages take. It determines even the very practical things like: are we going to have a neat, safe home, or one which is hospitable, where we may even entertain angels unaware? Are we going to have such sacrosanct routines with our children that we can barely ever leave the house, or will we have the flexibility to travel and go wherever God leads us? Are our children's bedtimes going to determine whether or not I meet together with the saints, or are our children going to learn from our example how precious these gatherings are to Jesus? Are we going to save up all our money to buy bigger houses, or are we going to live not necessarily knowing what the future looks like, but rather investing our resources into growing the Kingdom that will last forever?

The point of marriage is that we can do more together than we could ever do apart. It may be that in certain contexts of persecution, and for certain people who have the gift of celibacy, that singleness is better. But the rest of the Bible says team is more powerful and that two are better than one! This should be a source of encouragement for us as we seek God together as husband and wife.

Marriage is for This Life

On the topic of marriage, Jesus said something else which is very pertinent: He said that we won't be married in eternity! (Matthew 22:29) This means that marriage is a temporary state in which we sow our lives together for the hope of a plentiful harvest in heaven. It means that we cannot aim for a marriage based on happiness and security if our goal is reward in eternity. When we see the transitory nature of marriage, it really helps to clarify what is important. Even if we are married for 50 years, that may seem like a long time together here, but what will we be thinking of 200 years from now, or even 2 million years! Imagine how futile and pathetic it will seem in 2 million years from now to have made happiness and temporary pleasure the end goal of our marriage.

Marriage is best lived in anticipation of the resounding echo of 'Well done!' from the Father, which will resonate within us for time without end. The sound of God's pleasure over us will completely recast every hardship and struggle that we may face in our marriage here on earth. The joy and the wonder that we anticipate in the wedding feast of Christ and His bride should provoke us, as a couple, to a life lived in preparation for that day.

Fear God

When you are in a marriage relationship, it can so quickly become an exercise in learning how to meet each others needs. When we don't feel like our needs are met, then we may feel entitled to return in kind. Maybe I give the silent treatment or put my body *off-limits* to my partner. Maybe I get verbally or emotionally abusive because I feel that I have been wounded. But all of this behaviour neglects my primary motivation in marriage, which should not be that I love when I feel like I am being loved. I live for the glory of God. I am completely satisfied in God and I live to reflect Him and glorify Him in the way that I love my spouse.

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The consequences of me mistreating my spouse are far greater than an unhealthy marriage! In mistreating my spouse, I am sinning against a holy God. This means that I can never excuse sinful behaviour based on what my spouse is doing to me, because I am living in the face of God, under His gaze. I am living to reflect His light and receive His reward.

So here's the thing. Marriage is not going to be great in and of itself. Yes, it is true that you will enjoy companionship that you don't get outside of marriage. And yes, there are the joys of intimacy only found in marriage, but actually, a marriage that is not fulfilling the purpose that God has given it, is eventually going to feel unfulfilling and unsatisfying.

When we look back on our marriage from eternity, what are the best memories going to be? Surely it will be the people that we discipled together in our home, the orphans we adopted, the crazy outreaches we did as a family, the miracles, the times of faith and stretching and provision. It'll be the resources we gave away, the buildings we invested in, the churches we helped plant! At the end of the journey, we will come in like heroes from the war. Heroes with scars to show, just like Jesus. This may not be the dreamy kind of marriage that the big screens sell us, but this is how we live a marriage that has meaning, which is the very best kind.