# PERSPECTIVE

**APRIL 2019** 



**GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MARRIAGE** 

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## **God's Purpose for Marriage**

Imagine you dropped by your local elementary school and asked some of the children, "What is the purpose of marriage?" Think of the responses you might receive. I am sure you would laugh at some of the more outlandish answers and be surprised at some of the more insightful. But by and large, you wouldn't expect those students to fully understand the importance of marriage. The problem is that if you polled their parents, you would probably find a great deal of confusion as well. Adults don't seem to understand why marriage matters either!

In recent years, there has been an explosion of opinion pieces from a variety of news sources asking the same basic question: "Is marriage outdated?" Behind that question is the belief that marriage once had a purpose. Perhaps that purpose was economic security for women. Perhaps it was to produce children. Or maybe marriage is simply an outdated religious and cultural tradition. Either way, all of these answers imply marriage doesn't matter much anymore.

Those who still want marriage are looking for new reasons to explain the value of this age-old institution. They boil down the purpose of marriage to companionship, self-fulfillment, or a positive environment for raising children.

But all of these reasons miss the mark.

Marriage matters, and marriage has a purpose—one that does not change over time and between cultures. God's Word holds out a wonderful and timeless purpose for marriage, and this purpose makes a difference in how we think about the family ministry of the church.

This year at Mount Vernon, we are thinking a lot about family ministry. We are repeating this simple idea: "We are one family, partnering with parents to show the next generation the way of Christ." This idea of being one family is central to the idea of family ministry because "God has called the church to be a family of spiritual mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, who are responsible to hold each parent accountable to raise their children in the admonition of the Lord."2 Because marriage is the foundation of the family, if we are to partner with parents in the discipleship of their children, we must first partner with them in their marriages.

### THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Marriage shows up on the scene very early. God creates Eve to be a helper to Adam (Gen. 2:18) and establishes the marital covenant, the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24). From this we learn something of the purpose of marriage. Procreation is a vehicle by which Adam and Eve, and the husbands and wives that follow them, are going to exercise obedience to God's command to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

As history continues, we learn marriage is a picture of God's character and his relationship to his people. The people of Israel are commanded not to marry the inhabitants of Canaan. Why? To display God's holiness and maintain their own (Ex. 34:6; Deut. 7:3). Israel's pursuit of foreign gods is not just idolatrous; it's adulterous (Ezek. 16:15-43; Jer. 2:23-5:19). God even tells one of his prophets, Hosea, to marry a prostitute and then to redeem her and remain faithful to her despite her continued unfaithfulness to him. This is a real-life picture of God's faithfulness to his people despite their sin.

The Bible consistently uses marriage language to speak of the relationship between God and his people. From this we learn our faithfulness and devotion to our spouse is intended to be a picture of God's faithfulness to us. Marriage gives us a language and framework for understanding something of God himself.

Yet, it is not until the coming of Christ that we get a full picture of God's true purpose in marriage. More than once, Paul writes that in all things, including marriage, we are to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17). But it is in Ephesians 5:22-33 that Paul provides a robust purpose statement for marriage: to glorify God by displaying the relationship between Christ and the church. That reason, above all others, is the reason marriage exists. Yes, Scripture affirms some other purposes of marriage—procreation (Gen. 1:28), support and security (Gen. 2:18), satisfaction of sexual desire (1 Cor. 7:2), enjoyment (Prov. 18:22; Song of Songs)—but the wonderful and timeless purpose of marriage is to glorify God by displaying the relationship between Christ and the church.

Paul even provides a model for what this is supposed to look like. The husband is given the position of headship within marriage to be a picture of Christ's authority over the church (Eph. 5:23); therefore, the husband's sacrificial leadership is a picture of how Christ sacrificed himself for the church (Eph. 5:25). A wife's willing submission to her husband is a picture of how the church submits itself to Christ's authority (Eph. 5:24). Marital roles are God's design to make the gospel clear.

Marriage teaches us about Christ's relationship with his church. We are reminded of Christ's work on our behalf. We are pointed forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb in which Christ's bride, the church, will be presented to him without spot or blemish to his glory (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:6–10). Our purpose in marriage is to make this picture as clear as possible—to our children, other Christians, and the watching world. Married couples do this by:

- joyfully living out our God-ordained roles,
- sacrificially loving one another,
- forgiving one another,
- and living in peaceful unity with one another.

And what if you are not married? This is the understanding of marriage God wants you to have. This is how you should pray for those who are already married, and if you should one day marry, this is your target.

### WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

As members of a local church, we have a wonderful opportunity to come alongside one another and encourage the God-given institution of marriage. Because the church is *one family*, all members of the church can partner with married couples to "show the next generation the way of Christ." In other words, all members of the church, whether or not they are married, have a role to play in partnering with husbands and wives to help them pursue holiness and to help them teach the gospel to their children through their words and actions.

With this in mind, I have a word of encouragement for you in your current station in life.

### Are you currently married?

Know and love God's Word. A deeper understanding and appreciation of the gospel will lead you to live with your spouse in a way that's more consistent with the gospel message. If you have been healthily married for several years, disciple a younger couple. Teach them how to faithfully live out their roles as husband and wife (Titus 2:4–6). Invite them into your home and let them see how you relate to one another and how you disciple your own children. Finally, humbly receive marital advice and counsel from those in different stages of life, including those who are not married. Other brothers and sisters, whether they are married or not, have been given the Spirit and can see when the gospel is being obscured by your words and actions. They can see ways in which your conduct is not lining up with God's Word. In fact, those who are not married may have unique insight into some

common marital blind spots. For example, my younger brother has been living with us for the last year, and we have occasionally asked him to speak into our marriage and family life. He has gently and helpfully pointed out some ways in which we need to grow.

## Are you single?

Fuel gospel growth in your married friends by asking how their marriages are going. Encourage them in their marriages by telling them ways in which the marriages of parents, grandparents, or close friends pointed you to the gospel. It may be uncomfortable, but humbly and gently ask questions when you see things in their marriages that are not consistent with Scripture. I used to meet regularly with an unmarried member of MVBC, and I was often encouraged by his willingness to both ask me how I was doing as a husband and to probe deeper based on my response.

Also, consider discipling a less mature brother or sister who happens to be married to simply teach them to how to live out the Christian life (Heb. 3:12–13). Be emboldened that it was through Paul, who was unmarried, that God chose to give much of the New Testament teachings on marriage. As a fellow member of the body, you have a role to play in exhorting husbands and wives to holiness, not just for their sake, but for the sake of their gospel witness to their children.

For those of you who would like to be married, prioritize spending time with married couples you respect. Do this to see how they practically display the relationship between Christ and the church. Ask them questions. And recognize the importance of Paul's command to "not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). To intentionally marry someone who does not profess Christ or who is not faithfully following Christ is to reject God's purpose in marriage.

## Are you married to an unbeliever?

Faithfully live out your marital role as a gospel witness to both your spouse and children (1 Cor. 7:12–16). Your marriage can be a picture of the gospel if you persist in loving, serving, and honoring your unbelieving spouse. Since he or she is not a Christian, your marriage will not be the gospel picture you hope for, but your life can be. Living with an unbelieving spouse in the peace and joy of the Lord is a public testimony of the work of God's grace in your life. Pray for the salvation of your spouse, and do not speak poorly of your spouse to others, particularly your children. Finally, and I know this can be hard, praise the Lord for how he is using marriage to sanctify you.

## Are you (or were you) in a difficult marriage?

I do not want to minimize the hurt of your experience. Nonetheless, I want to encourage you to speak well of marriage. Your own marriage may be or may have been a source of heartache, but Christians are called to honor the institution of marriage (Heb. 13:4). If you are married, keeping fighting! Don't give up. The power of God's grace may yet restore the picture of the gospel your marriage is intended to be. Lean into the church, and let other brothers and sisters partner with you in your fight. For those of you who are divorced, encourage other brothers and sisters to fight for their own marriages. Be willing to let them learn from your experience. We want to embrace the reality that God has granted biblical grounds for divorce. At the same time, we want to remain open to God resurrecting a marriage from the ashes of sin.

## Are you a widow or widower?

The Lord has equipped you through your own suffering to encourage other married couples to fix their eyes on eternal things (Col. 3:1). You can model a Christpowered, heavenly hope during suffering (James 1:2-4, 12). This will help others live out the same gospel hope. It is wonderfully instructive to show other believers that Christ, not marriage, is your life. Take comfort in the fact God has given you the church to be a source of support, encouragement, and companionship. Our marriages will not endure for eternity (Luke 20:34-35), but our union with Christ and our relationship with one another as members of one family will last forever.

### A WORD ON HELPING THE HURTING

As one family, we should show compassion to our widows and widowers. Death is painful, especially when it breaks the "one flesh" union. Therefore, find ways to support these brothers or sisters. Pray for them. Be generous with both your finances (James 1:27) and your time. Show hospitality to these members by inviting them into your home and by visiting those who are homebound. Ask them about some of the unique challenges they face as those who have lost a spouse. Letting your children hear their stories and their perseverance in the faith is a powerful testimony to God's faithfulness and the power of the gospel.

Are you aware of brothers and sisters going through marital difficulties? Offer to come alongside them. They may already have counselors encouraging them but maybe they don't. If God has made you aware of a struggling marriage, offer to help. If you don't feel equipped, encourage them to seek out the wisdom of

an older brother or sister in Christ, even an elder of the church. You may very well be the means God has ordained to bring comfort and counsel to someone in need.

One of the best ways to help the hurting is to live in a way that commends God's purpose in marriage. We all need the gospel. We need it all the time, so lovingly defend a biblical view of marriage—this is an opportunity to share the gospel. If you are married, invite unbelievers into your home that they may see a picture of the gospel in the way you interact with your spouse. Live out the gospel in your marriage so that the gospel words you speak to your children will be confirmed by your example.

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of marriage is to glorify God by displaying the relationship between Christ and the church. However, a church and its members will not sustain this vision by focusing on marriage, but rather by focusing on the glorious gospel to which it points. "Marriage lived for the glory of God will be the fruit of churches permeated with the glory of God...if we want marriage to glorify the truth and worth and beauty and greatness of God, we must teach and preach less about marriage and more about God."4

So, as we seek as one family to partner with married couples to show the next generation the way of Christ, we must not just uphold a high view of marriage, but a high view of God. The desire to glorify God in marriage fundamentally springs from a love for God and a desire to glorify him in all areas of life. Brothers and sisters, if you want to partner with married couples, grow in your own love of God and help others grow in theirs. Jesus has commissioned all of us for this work.

- Jesse Brannen

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Aaron Menikoff, "The Church as One Family," Perspective, January 2019. mvbchurch.org/files/Perspective\_ January\_2019.pdf

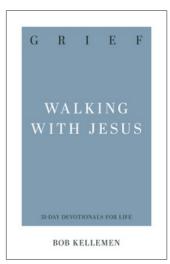
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Kyle Gross, "Partnering with Parents," Perspective, February 2019. mvbchurch.org/files/Perspective\_ February\_2019.pdf

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> John Piper, "The Surpassing Goal: Marriage Lived for the Glory of God," Desiring God, September 7, 2002. https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-surpassing-goalmarriage-lived-for-the-glory-of-god

## Grief: Walking With Jesus

Written by Bob Kellemen



Bob Kellemen is Vice President of Strategic Development and Academic Dean for Faith Bible Seminary in Lafayette, Indiana, and is pastor of counseling ministries at Bethel Church in northwest Indiana. His book, Grief: Walking With Jesus is a wonderful 31-day devotional for the grieving that is part of the 31-Day Devotionals For Life series sponsored by the Biblical Counseling Coalition. Organized in 31 short, twopage chapters, each day touches on specific, helpful Scriptures and concludes with thought-provoking points of reflection and application. Not meant to be a

comprehensive guide to coping with grief, Kellemen presents quality insights into certain biblical passages pertaining to grief, particularly the grief of Jesus. You will learn how much Jesus understands and cares about not only grief in general but about your grief.

We are reminded that grief comes in all forms and fashions because loss occurs in all shapes and sizes. The devastating grief that accompanies death comes readily to mind, but what about the grief that comes from a critical word, a serious accident, betrayal, rejection, the terminal diagnosis, separation and divorce, job termination, or a church split? How are Christians supposed to grieve? Kellemen draws us to the gospel, to the man of sorrows, despised and rejected by men, who intimately and intensely experienced grief, sorrow, loss, and pain. He brings us to the Savior who draws close and brings peace.

What I love about this devotional is the feeling that you are on a 31day journey through the life of Jesus. Each day is focused on a specific Scripture that is Jesus understanding me, encouraging me, and teaching me how to deal with the grief that comes from loss by applying these gospel truths (from Kellemen's introduction):

- Jesus is a suffering Savior who is intimately acquainted with our grief. It's normal to hurt.
- Jesus is a compassionate Savior who lovingly consoles us in our grief. It's possible to find comfort in our hurt.
- Jesus is a healing Savior who compassionately speaks eternal truth into our earthly wounds. It's possible to grieve with hope.
- Jesus is an empowering Savior who mightily enables us to comfort others with the comfort we receive from God. It's supernatural to love in the midst of loss.

Kellemen gently and purposely reminds us in our grief that our hope is in Christ Jesus, that we can worship and glorify God amid our gospelcentered lament. I intend to take this "journey" again and again.

- Recommended by Rick Hutchins

## **Excerpts From** the Book

""In grief, we are tempted to view God through the lens of our loss. Christ invites us to view the Father through the lens of the cross."

- Day 7-Opening the Eyes of Your Heart, p. 25

"Jesus looks on you and me with honest eyes and a tender heart that is concerned with our losses and grief. But Jesus knows the end of the story—so, when he peers into your life, he sees not only your current hurt but also your future joy."

- Day 10-You Shall Be Comforted, p.31

"Can we be Jesus-like in our pain? Can we lament, weep, care, pray for, and minister to the very ones who break our hearts and cause our grief?" - Day 22-Jesus Laments, p.54

"Jesus never denies the troubles of this present, dark world. However, he always enters our darkness with the light of his presence."

- Day 24-Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled, p.60

## Missional Motherhood

Written by Gloria Furman



Missional Motherhood, by Gloria Furman, is chock-full of foundational truths concerning missional mothering for every woman. This is not a tips-and-tricks for practical mothering type of book. If you have questions, however, about what value God places on mothering, Furman makes it clear that mothering is foundational. It is rooted in the gospel. Women have been a part of God's plan from the very beginning and still are.

Mothering is not all about diapers, minivans, or mother-of-the-bride dresses. At the same time, mothering is not an

additional duty to distract women from their dream or from doing what's truly important. Mothering is a God-given mission for all women, a mission about the eternal souls of those he providentially puts in our lives and about our call as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations! Furman states it this way, "When I say mother,' I want you to think of it as a verb too... Mothering (or nurturing) is a calling for all women, not just those who have biological or adopted children. Every Christian woman is called to the spiritual motherhood of making disciples of all nations... Our missional motherhood looks different in our contexts, but the source and goal of our ministry is the same." Furman says that "missional motherhood is a walk of faith where the weak (that's all of us) must keep before them the scenic view of the cross." She does not, however, limit our view to the cross, but calls her readers to look all the way back to creation and to God's covenant with his people showing how the value of mothering is knit into the storyline of Scripture. Women are called to be glory-bearing life-givers!

Those in a busy season of life will benefit greatly by reading the introduction, conclusion, and first couple of chapters. These sections contain timely truths about biblical mothering for all women. The book is broken down into two parts. Part one: Motherhood in the Grand Plan of God, contains a beautifully written Old Testament overview revealing God's epic plan for redeeming mankind while sprinkling in truths about the mothering mission of women along the way. Part two: The Everyday Ministry of Motherhood, explains that Jesus, as Prophet, Priest, and King defines the disciple-making mission of mothering. While this section contains some excellent truths, honestly, it was hard for me to follow.

In *Missional Motherhood*, Furman reminds us that God ordained motherhood to be a means of fulfilling his covenant and purposes for his glory and our good. A timely reminder for us all.

- Recommended by Amy Brewer

## Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"God creates each of our days with opportunities to be glad-hearted, life-giving, glory bearers. Only Christ is strong enough to accomplish this work in and through us. Missional motherhood isn't an exercise in muscling up strength to do stuff for God. Missional motherhood is a walk of faith where the weak (that's all of us) must keep before them the scenic view of the cross."

– Mother Is A Verb Too p.25

## 2

"When we are confident in Christ's righteousness, we will die to ourselves a thousand deaths a day as we serve others."

— Christ, Every Mother's Prophet, p.135

## 3

"Missional motherhood is not just for women who have given birth... Or for those who have adopted children... The motherhood to which every Christian woman is called is making disciples of all nations... In this sense there is no Christian woman who is child-free."

— Christ, Every Mother's King, p.166

## 4

"The world says your work is mundane, but every mothering and discipling moment in your life is actually unique—unprecedented in history and never to be repeated. Your work in evangelism and discipleship done through the power of the Spirit gives Jesus praise that echoes in eternity."

— Conclusion, p.198

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Last month, Aaron spent time in East Asia speaking at a men's conference and preaching at a house church. Before he left, he wrote this letter. Be encouraged by God's at work around the world.

March 18, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Greetings in the name of Christ. I'm writing from East Asia. These past few days, I've had the privilege of being part of the house church movement. I've heard about this work for many, many years. I count it a great honor to actually be here and to spend so much time with members of persecuted churches.

My time began at a men's conference on the outskirts of a large city. Eight churches sent a total of about ninety men for two full days of teaching. Of the eight, two of the churches are international, English speaking congregations with a large, Asian contingent. The rest are entirely indigenous congregations. All these churches are, technically, illegal. In fact, that's what makes a house church here a "house" church—not meeting in a house but being an unregistered assembly. These congregations rent meeting space.

If these congregations remain under about 150 in attendance on a Sunday, they typically stay under the government's radar. They are, in a sense, hiding in plain sight. However, as they grow (and they are growing), they risk drawing police attention. In fact, one pastor I met at the conference told me he's leading a congregation formed when persecution forced his congregation to split. My conversation with him reminded me of Acts 8:4 where Saul's persecution of the Jerusalem church led the scattered believers to go about "preaching the word" all the more.

The church body I gathered with on Sunday morning meets in a hotel downtown. Their meeting looks very similar to ours. The main difference is they live with the threat of police officers disrupting them and forcing them to disperse. The locals who gather with this family are especially at risk. The danger is increasing right now as the attendance is pushing 200 on Sunday morning.

Most of these house churches are seeing growth. Why are they growing? The Holy Spirit is powerfully at work raising up elders who are faithfully teaching the Word of God and shepherding the flock of God. These congregations are full of evangelists, taking the gospel to their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and college students in the city. At the end of the men's conference, two young brothers stood up in front of the meeting and invited everyone to participate in evangelism on university campuses. Our Asian brothers and sisters are joining churches for the same reasons we are joining churches. They want solid, gospel preaching and faithful, gospel community.

In East Asia, access to theological education is quite limited. There are underground seminaries, and they are doing good work. In fact, one seminary president shared at the men's conference about the scope and sequence of theological training he offered. However, I met several men who traveled to America, at great expense, to fast-track their theological education. Some of them even participated in church-based internships in the states. It is quite difficult to receive a full-time seminary education in this country.

Nonetheless, with each passing day, the indigenous work is increasing. The churches I mentioned at the men's conference are part of a network of Baptist churches in this city. They cooperate not only for men's retreats and campus evangelism, but share resources to train men who may be the next generation of house church pastors. These brothers raise funds for full-time internships at local churches. Some are trying to continue their education in the states, but most will simply do their best to know the Word of God where they are, and seek to be called as preaching pastors in a local house church right here. Make no mistake, they are risking a great deal to pursue pastoral ministry. They have no guarantee of

a safe future.

On Sunday afternoon, after gathering with the saints, I went to the park with a partner-in-ministry and two of his kids. On the playground, we ran into three Asian children—children my friend knew. Their father is a lay elder in a church in the western part of this country. In December, the government jailed him for preaching the gospel. He remains in prison, and his wife is under house arrest in their hometown. They sent the children to seek refuge with family friends. As I saw these kids playing on a jungle-gym, I thought about my own children who have never feared their father wouldn't come home after a day in the office!

At the conference, during a time of Q & A, I was asked how the church in America is suffering and what they can learn about faithful Christian ministry from us. I hid my shock at the question. Doesn't he know the level of persecution Americans face is like an ice cube compared to the iceberg of scrutiny they face every day?

Church family, my point in writing you this letter is not to arouse feelings of guilt for living in America and enjoying religious freedom. I simply want us to be thankful to God for the opportunities we have to gather, evangelize, and live out our faith unencumbered by government interference. Perhaps this will one day change in our country, but for now, we should be deeply grateful. But I'm not just thankful for our freedom, I'm thankful for their persecution. Yes, I do pray it would end. But I also see the way our brothers and sisters in East Asia are flourishing. Their churches are growing. People are hungry for the Word of God. They are sharing the gospel regularly. And they are gathering even though it comes at great risk. I see the gospel changing lives. One brother I met had been baptized along with his wife just two weeks ago. He heard the Good News from another East Asian brother. He's in his 50s. I sat behind him in Sunday school as he asked questions about how the gospel affects how to view work. I saw his excitement after the sermon as he thanked me for the message. God is at work.

But there's more. When the Sunday morning service ended, I met a woman who has been in East Asia for a long time. She and her husband have been at work on an underground seminary. They bring in American pastors to teach the house church pastors. They asked if I knew Frank and Carey Louthan because the Louthans have been their partners in ministry for years. My Sunday morning ended with a reminder God had been at work, long before I arrived, equipping his churches in East Asia through members of Mount Vernon.

Again, please thank God for the freedom we have both to worship in private and to exercise our faith in public. Be bold in your evangelism. Let's strive to do all we can for the persecuted church. This could include supporting sister churches in this great city, financing men training for ministry, perhaps even offering to bring men over for an internship with us. Maybe you want to do more? The field in East Asia is ripe for the harvest. They could use internationals—faithful Christians—to be a part of this growing house church movement. Maybe you should go.

Whatever you decide to do, please know that Jesus is at work around the world. I've now seen his handiwork in East Asia, and I'm deeply encouraged. I praise the Lord that his name is proclaimed night and day. Human empires rise and fall, but the sun never sets on the glory of God.

With love in Christ, your pastor,

Aaron

# **APRIL**

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

April 1	Isaiah 52:13-53:6	April 17	Luke 23:18–25
April 2	Isaiah 52:1-12	April 18	Luke 23:26-43
April 3	Isaiah 53:7-12	April 19	Luke 23:44-56
April 4	2 Corinthians 5:16–21	April 20	Luke 24:1-12
April 5	1 Peter 2:13–25	April 21	Luke 24:1-12
April 6	Isaiah 53:4-6	April 22	Romans 3:21-31
April 7	Isaiah 53:4-6	April 23	Romans 2:1-11
April 8	Mark 10:35–45	April 24	Romans 2:12-29
April 9	Mark 10:13–16	April 25	Romans 3:1-20
April 10	Mark 10:17-34	April 26	Leviticus 16:1-10
April 11	Mark 10:46-11:11	April 27	Romans 3:21-31
April 12	Isaiah 51:17-23	April 28	Romans 3:21-31
April 13	Mark 10:35-45	*Sermons in bold	
April 14	Mark 10:35-45		



Luke 24:1-12

Luke 23:1-17

April 15

April 16

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# NEW MEMBERS



John & Patsy Butman



Rachel Menikoff



Angela Murray



Will & Emily Pickens



Abigail Sandau

