

God's Will for Marriage

God said it at the time of creation, **"It is not good for the man to be alone."** Many years later, Solomon was inspired by God to write in Ecclesiastes, **"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."**

Today we look at the gift of marriage. Our Lord gifts us in so many ways. The fine weather. Providing all the food we need. The opportunity to work and support others through our salary. Giving us family members, and friends; even football teams to root for. A church home where we can come to be refreshed with his Word and Sacrament.

We each enjoy different blessings that God pours into our lives. Those who are not married are blessed in other ways. But today we are looking at this gift that the Lord gives many of us—the gift of marriage.

Before we get to Jesus' words, let's review the first marriage on earth. God made Adam, put him in the Garden of Eden, had him start by naming the animals—and Adam realized that none of them was like him; none was a true companion for his life on earth. Now Adam could look for God to provide him a further blessing. Sure enough, God made a woman, Eve, and brought her to Adam, and they were married.

Look at the blessings God gave them—and God gives us today in his gift of marriage. First, companionship. **"It is not good for the man to be alone,"** God had said. So God made another person to give Adam someone to talk with, someone to enjoy the world with. But God wanted Adam and Eve to have a much greater blessing. So he had them make a life-long commitment to one another. And then God said that today, **"a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."**

The life-long commitment of marriage is unconditional. To say, "I'll marry you if you stop drinking or smoking or whatever," or, "I'll marry you so long as you don't drink or smoke or whatever," is no real commitment; such a marriage will have a hard time succeeding.

And, we should note, the commitment of marriage really begins before the wedding ceremony. After all, when you go to a wedding, you're probably not laying odds on whether the couple is going to show up or not; no, they've really made that life-long commitment before that day. Traditionally engagement was viewed this way—a binding promise to be married. The wedding ceremony is the time for public vows and a legal commitment; after the wedding, the couple begins to live together, husband and wife, bound together.

You may have friends, friends you've known for years; chances are those friendships have had good years and some years where you weren't so close. But a spouse is committed.

Marriage consists of a vow to be faithful to one another. Forsaking all others. Just think of how that frees a person. What happens when a friendship changes—maybe because your friend got married or had a child or moved away, maybe because your friend offended you. You may try to work it out with the person, but it's likely that the friendship will fade, and the person will be less important at least for a while. But once you've made a commitment to your spouse, you've made a promise to work things out. You need to talk through the problem, because you are not two people, you are one marriage.

Marriage forces us to grow up. It forces us to admit our own shortcomings. That commitment drives us to love, that is, to be more concerned about the other person, and change our own behavior. Marriage provides a unique opportunity to grow in companionship.

Unfortunately, sin keeps interfering. In courtship, it's common that the couple can't get enough of each other's company. After marriage, they find many things pulling them apart. Husbands find companionship with friends who enjoy the same hobbies or sports, wives who may feel lonely turn to female friends, or even children. Now, it's good to have other friends; but when they become a substitute for one's spouse, then God's intended blessing is lost.

Given that a wife and a husband are two different people, life-long companionship is not going to be automatic. They need to nourish their relationship, sharing their joys and concerns, finding activities they both enjoy.

Years ago when the space shuttles were flying, one of them was grounded for a day because of woodpeckers. Woodpeckers had found the insulating foam on the shuttle's external fuel tank irresistible for pecking. That could cause serious damage. Marriages are frequently grounded not by the big things, but by little things: criticism, lack of respect, taking each other for granted can peck away at a relationship. We need to examine our behavior and repent.

But the Lord gives us exactly what we need to make that relationship work—his love for us. Recall what we read from Ephesians: **“Wives, place yourselves under your husbands’ authority as you have placed yourself under the Lord’s authority....Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.”** It is God's amazing love that inspires our commitment to one another in marriage.

Do you want an example of commitment? Look at what Jesus did for you. He left his heavenly throne to be your Savior. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. For all the times you have been selfish, Jesus was self-less. Married couples don't just learn about love; they learn about their own sin, which pops up in self-centered attitudes and words. But Jesus replaced every one of those times you were sinful, with his own amazing love. Look at our Gospel—Jesus did not go along with the sinful thinking of the Pharisees; and when his disciples wanted to ignore the little children, Jesus took those children in his arms and blessed them. Jesus replaced their selfishness with his perfect love. Every sin you have committed has been overcome by Jesus' love. And his death has paid the price for all of your sins.

Now we can love like Christ loved. And we can be committed to one another.

Of course, the world says this is impossible. The Pharisees came to Jesus claiming that Moses in the Old Testament allowed them to get divorced for any reason, or for no reason. Jesus

would have none of that. Husband and wife **“are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** And Jesus does not command the impossible. The love Jesus has for us gives us the strength to persevere in marriage. As 1 Corinthians says, “love never fails.”

Marriages sometimes do fail. That is because of sin. One or both of the spouses breaks the marriage, by adultery, by desertion, by abuse. That loving companionship God intended is destroyed. The guilty party can repent and be forgiven. But the marriage may be over—in fact, the innocent party can Scripturally get a divorce, which is simply saying publically that the other person has ended the marriage by deserting or adultery. Scripture says that God hates divorce. God so much wants us to enjoy his blessings, instead of the pain that sin brings.

May those of us who are married re-commit ourselves to our spouses, to be faithful as God intended, so that we can enjoy his blessing of companionship on earth.

There are other blessings in marriage. Through marriage God would prevent immorality by providing sexual happiness. 1 Corinthians 7 notes this purpose of marriage. Genesis alludes to it when it says **“the two will become one flesh.”**

The world makes sex something dirty. Sex is an opportunity for people to be selfish. Some turn sexual relations into a power struggle; one person insists on sex, or withholds sex, to hurt the other. This may even lead to sexual abuse. But God intends sex as a wonderful opportunity to show love to each other. Again, think of the words in Ephesians, where husband and wife love each other unselfishly, with mutual respect. Christian couples often report greater sexual happiness, because their sexuality is a reflection of the love they have for each other.

Another blessing of marriage is children. God told Adam and Even to be fruitful and multiply. Not that couples have to have a certain number of children. But they should make such decisions recognizing what blessings God promises children will be.

Our sinful world will view children selfishly. Either it says don't have children so you don't have your freedom restricted; or simply use your children for yourself—maybe to show off, or turn your children into little copies of yourself. The world would not have us raise our children in Christian discipline and instruction.

Jesus valued children. Here's a little quiz: There were times when Jesus was frustrated with his disciples, when they did not follow his teachings: but when did Jesus get mad at his disciples? In our Gospel, when they tried to keep children away from him. **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** Christian parents get to learn so much in raising their children. And the privilege of training these young people to know Jesus may be the greatest joy one can have on earth.

So let us marvel at the blessings God gives us in marriage. People may joke about marriages not lasting; and we recognize the dangers in our sinful world and our sinful selves. But God who blesses us in so many ways provides this opportunity for more blessings. May those who are married and those who desire to marry work to follow God's Will for Marriage, so that his blessings will be poured upon our lives. Amen.