

A Seal Upon the Heart

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January 1

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

INSTITUTED OF GOD. Today we think of marriage as a romantic relationship between two people on whom the marriage ceremony bestows some legal benefits. However, the Bible says marriage is the invention of God, and therefore it is woven into the very fabric of our human nature. The first mention of gender and marriage in the Bible occurs with the first mention of humanity itself. And while not all individuals must marry, the human race as a whole is built for it. No human society can thrive without healthy marriages.

Reflection: What links do you see between the health of people in general and the health of marriages?

Prayer: Lord, the strength of our marriages makes for well-being in society. Forgive me for thinking so narrowly and so selfishly about this. As we pursue happy marriages, help us to do it for your sake and for others' sake as well as for ourselves. Amen.

January 2

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18a)

THE NECESSITY OF FRIENDSHIP. Genesis shows us God creating everything "good." But the first thing declared *not* good is Adam's being alone. This means we have a God-created need that nothing but human love relationships can satisfy. Even Adam's unimpeded relationship with God and his home in paradise could not completely fulfill it. Loneliness, then, is not a sin, and this means two things. First, while it is not necessary to be married (e.g., Paul and Jesus), it *is* necessary for a thriving human life to have great friendships. Second, when God brings Eve to Adam it is clear she is not merely a sexual or business partner, but the friend for whom he has yearned.

Reflection: It is possible for spouses to give so much to co-parenting, romance, sexuality, and administering their affairs that they neglect their friendship. How can you avoid that?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are not only our true spouse (Ephesians 5:25–26) but also our greatest friend (John 15:12–15). Let our marriages be full of the truthfulness, affection, and faithful commitment of friendship. Amen.

January 3

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

LEAVING. Marriage entails *leaving*. It does not mean you reject or abandon your family of origin. Rather, it means that the needs and concerns of your present family take precedence over the desires and practices of your former family. You should work out new patterns of life together that fit your particular context, gifts, and needs. You have not “left” your former family if you automatically insist that everything in your marriage be done like you saw it done in your parents’ marriage and family. In short, your spouse should have uncontested priority in your heart. The regard you have for your parents or even for your children should not rival that which you have for your spouse.

Reflection: Make a list of the ways that you can fail to “leave” and to transfer your supreme loyalty from all others to your spouse.

Prayer: Lord, take away our divided hearts. Let us love you more than all other beings in the universe. And when we marry, enable us to love each other more than any other person in the world. Amen.

January 4

Then the Lord God made a woman . . . and . . . brought her to the man. . . . That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:22, 24)

PROMISING. Genesis 2:22–25 is the first marriage ceremony, in which “God himself, like a father of the bride, leads the woman to the man.”¹ The word “united” translates a Hebrew word meaning a binding covenantal relationship (Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22–23). In our individualistic society, the legality of marriage seems inconsequential. It’s said to be “just a piece of paper” and that what matters is that we love each other. Yet if you truly love each other, why not give yourselves to each other in every way—physically, emotionally, personally, legally, socially, and economically? That’s what happens in a marriage covenant, and it is done through making a promise.

Reflection: Why are people hesitant to marry? What are the ways that our culture undermines this view of marriage as a covenant?

Prayer: Lord, we live in a commitment-fearing culture. We have been taught to always keep our relational options open, yet we don’t want people to love *us* like that! Teach us how to be faithful friends and faithful spouses, in fair weather and foul, for better and for worse. You have been that to us. Amen.

January 5

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

CLEAVING. Older translations say that a man should “cleave unto his wife”—a term that means literally to be glued to something. Why is a binding covenant, created by solemn vows, so crucial to the biblical understanding of marriage? First, it is a crucial test. The willingness to enter a lifelong covenant is evidence that your love for each other has reached marriage-level proportions. Second, it is resource for strength. There will be hard times in any marriage, in which your patience and love will need the support of knowing you made a solemn promise. Last, it is instructive. The covenant teaches us that marriage is not ultimately about self-fulfillment but about self-giving.²

Reflection: “A wedding vow is confining in the short run but liberating in the long run.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Prayer: Lord, when our commitment to covenantal marriage weakens, help us remember your unwavering faithfulness to us, going even to the death of the cross. Amen.

January 6

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

UNITING. A husband and wife become *one flesh*. “Flesh” in the Bible is often a synecdoche for the entire person (as in “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” Acts 2:17). Just as male and female literally fit together as a whole in sex, so a husband and wife enter a deep personal union at all levels of their lives. They become physically, emotionally, socially, legally one. Sexual union, then, is a way to renew and deepen the covenant of marriage. It is an acting out, physically, of the inseparable oneness in all other areas created by the marriage covenant.

Reflection: How can sex be an ideal way to renew the marriage vow? How can married sex be practiced in such a way that fails to reflect the marriage vow? What can you do to avoid this?

Prayer: Lord, we have been taught that sex exists for self-fulfillment, not for self-giving. Help us to think about it differently. Show us how human sexuality should reflect your own love for us. Amen.

January 7

Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."
(Genesis 1:27–28)

PROCREATIVITY. Just as not all people must be married, so not all marriages will produce children. Nevertheless, God has designed marriage to be capable of creating and nurturing new life. Only male and female together, each doing something the other cannot, can produce new human beings. Then, as children grow in the presence of both mother and father, they are exposed to the unique glories and strengths of male and female humanity. Finally, the lifelong commitment of marriage gives children the necessary security and stability that they need to thrive. So God gives to marriage the procreativity that is a reflection of his own life-giving creativity.

Reflection: Think out the ways that every aspect of biblical marriage supports the reproduction and nurture of new human beings.

Prayer: Lord, you could have simply made new humans materialize by your power. Instead you made us your partners in bearing new human life into the world and nurturing them through committed love. Thank you for this great gift. Give more of us the wisdom and character we will need to use it well. Amen.