



THE DIAMOND MARRIAGE

*Have Ultimate Purpose
in your Marriage*

Simon Vibert

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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1-84550-076-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published in 2005
by
Christian Focus Publications, Ltd.
Geanies House, Fearn, Tain,
Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

www.christianfocus.com

Cover Design by Moose77 Designs

Printed and bound by
Norhaven, Denmark

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To Caroline,

my complementary counterpart
and partner in our enacted parable.

My gratitude also goes to the staff at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, and to Dr John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church Minneapolis for all that he taught me about Jonathan Edwards.





PREFACE

Do we really need another book on marriage? Christian and non-Christian books on husband/wife relationships are reaching near epidemic proportions. Without wishing to fire all my guns at this point, I should explain that I write as a husband, as a Christian, as a pastor and as a Bible teacher. I am not primarily concerned about the husband and wife relationship – yes, this book does have a lot to say about that subject, but only secondarily. My main task is to pose the question: ‘What is the chief, or ultimate, end of marriage?’ I am not just asking, ‘In what way should God be involved in marriage?’ Rather, my question is, ‘Why has God gone to such great lengths to make marriage as we know it?’ or ‘What is the purpose of marriage?’

This is a daunting task! There are two subjects which are likely to bring shame and humiliation on the author: one source of embarrassment would be to write on prayer, the other would be to write on marriage. For, in both of these areas, the author is painfully aware of his own shortcomings. Actually, it could be argued that to write on marriage is likely to bring even more embarrassment than if one were to write on prayer, for at least shortcomings in prayer, for the most part, are only known to GOD!! However, my wife is very aware of how much I fail as a husband but, mercifully, and rather





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like God, she loves me even though she has come to know me through and through!

There is, in fact, a closer link between marriage and prayer than might at first be thought. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul states that prayer is a good reason for abstinence and sexual discipline in the marriage relationship. But, only for a short time, after which, the couple should come back together.

There is one final justification for writing this book. It is that I write as a fellow marriage practitioner! I experience the joys and difficulties of marriage. But, most of all, I can write with the confidence that God has spoken with clarity and practical wisdom about the subject. After all, marriage was his idea in the first place, and he has not left us in the dark, but rather speaks clearly in his word.

So what follows is a book based almost exclusively on one text from the Bible, Genesis 2:24. And, though my failures be many, I am confident that a theologically applied explanation of this text will, I hope under God, be used to build your marriage – and maybe even your prayer life too!





INTRODUCTION

It was a wonderful occasion. The happy couple gathered all the family around them to celebrate their diamond wedding anniversary. Inspired by the occasion, the elderly husband called for a moment of hush, as he raised his glass to his wife, 'My darling, after sixty years of marriage I can tell all my family and friends that I have found you to be tried and true!' An approving murmur settled across the room. His wife lent forward on her stick, cupped her hand to her ear and said, 'Eh?'

Patiently, the husband repeated, 'My darling, after sixty years of marriage I can tell all my family and friends that I have found you tried and true!' Another murmur of approval. But the wife shouted in a loud voice, 'What?'

Rather louder, and a little less patiently, the husband said, 'After sixty years of marriage I have found you tried and true!' 'Huh,' replied the wife, 'and I can tell you that after sixty years of marriage I am sick and tired of you too!'

By anyone's reckoning, to reach a Diamond Wedding Anniversary is quite an achievement. It is hardly necessary to cite the current divorce statistics to make the point. However, I have been very struck by the fact that a recent Barna report¹ discovered that the national divorce rate stands at about 34 percent. While the divorce rates among those who





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claim to be Christian stands at 33 percent. Apparently, even holding Christian convictions does not reduce the incidence of divorce.

With those statistics in mind, we might be surprised to discover how many people still believe that marriage is a good idea and enter into it – once, indeed maybe several times!

One glorious Friday afternoon I met up with a friend to play nine holes of golf at my local course. The first hole is pretty easy. It is only 127 yards. I am sure that it is designed to break you in gently. Even despite this fact, I was left amazed by the first stroke played by the person in front of me.

He struck the ball well, it curved nicely and headed straight for the green. The ball plopped a few yards away from the hole, gently stopping and teetering on the edge of the hole, less than an inch away. I tell you, even though it was *someone else's* shot, it was still very exciting!

My first shot was rather less spectacular. However, the game went on. A few holes later I bumped into a guy who had given me a few golf lessons. He is a tested, professional golfer. With excitement, I told him about the first shot which had been played in front of me. With a twinkle in his eye, and not a little cynicism, he said to me, 'The only problem with a first shot like that is that you know that your game is going down hill from then on!'

The following day, a Saturday, I was taking the wedding of a long-standing church couple. There were any number of parallels which I could have drawn between the game of golf and marriage, but I resisted. What I did say to them was that so many people's view of marriage is rather like the comment my golf instructor made about that first golf shot. It all starts on the most amazing high – beautiful flowers, beautiful dress, beautiful bride, beautiful service and beautiful reception.

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And, if the couple are fortunate, they're off on a wonderful honeymoon.

Then they come down to earth with a bump. It goes downhill from then on. They come back to their job, their mortgage, the familiarity of everyday life and slowly the reality sets in, and the initial joy and enthusiasm of marriage fades away.

This is a common perception of marriage. But is this scenario avoidable? It certainly seems that even today's Christians are less convinced that they should stick together 'till death do us part'. Divorce rates among Christian couples almost match those of non-Christian couples.

What Motivated Me to Study this Topic

As pastor of an evangelical church in London, I frequently come across Christian couples for whom marriage has become a faithful, but joyless, fulfilment of duty. There has been no adultery or unfaithfulness, but the marriage does not reflect the love that Christ has for the church (Eph. 5:21-32).

Most Christians take seriously the covenantal/contractual commitment made in the sight of God. Traditionally, this assumes that the married couple have become 'one flesh', and what 'God has joined together' should not be separated. Increasingly, couples in such situations are not persisting in their marriage and conclude that their marriage has lost its love, and divorce often ensues. It appears that, while a dutiful acceptance of biblical principles has been sufficient to keep marriages together in the past, Christian couples are no longer staying together when the display of joy in the marriage is absent.

This familiar scenario led me to ask whether we should be happy with such a view of Christian marriage. Why are many

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Christian marriages dutiful but joyless? What has led us to be content with such an understanding of Christian love in marriage?

Part of the problem is revealed in a lack of adequate definition of *agapē* love. I sat in another church congregation last Sunday and heard a typical exposition of the biblical view of love. The preacher stated, when the passage uses the word *agapē* it does not mean 'feeling love, but action love'. This is an insufficient understanding of the word. Indeed, perhaps part of the problem in the Ephesian church which we are about to look at, is precisely this problem of defining love as if it had nothing to do with emotions and feelings.

The Ephesian Church – Dutiful but Loveless

Revelation 2:1–7

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place.

6 But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.





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Ephesus was a grand and proud city. At one time it was the commercial centre of Asia. The patron saint was the goddess Diana. Her image graced the trinket shops around the town (presumably, not controlled by royal copyright!).

When the apostle Paul began preaching in this city, there was such a dramatic impact that the idolatrous practices – and sale of such idols – immediately sent the town into turmoil (see Acts 19 for the details).

Several decades later, the apostle John writes to this church. Apparently, they have not waned in their hatred of idolatry, and Jesus has much to commend them for. But, as we shall see in a moment, their very zeal in certain areas has led to condemnation from Jesus too.

First, we notice, the Ephesians are commended for their intolerant zeal (vv. 2–3). They are not like those nauseating, lukewarm Laodiceans (Rev. 3:16). No! They are red hot, disciplined, faithful disciples. In particular, they hate the idolatrous practices of the Nicolaitans. We are not exactly sure what those practices were, but they seem to include a kind-of spiritual adultery – mixing beliefs and combining them with sexual immorality. But the Ephesians were to have none of that. Today, we might call the Ephesians narrow-minded fundamentalists! But Jesus commends them for their intolerant, steadfast loyalty to God.

But this is not the whole story. Jesus also has words of condemnation. His words are a very sad indictment on the church: 'Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love' (Rev. 2:4). In their zeal for the honour of God's name, their love for Jesus himself has grown cold. Or, to change the imagery, like many marriages, the couple have resisted the enticement of immorality and adultery but, sadly, the marriage has gone cold.





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Sometimes a severe storm can blow over the apparently most sturdy of trees. Other times the tree seems to withstand all of that, but mysteriously withers and dies – only after it has fallen, does it become apparent that the inside has been eaten away by disease.

The church at Ephesus has become like that tree. The joy of the Lord is absent. Sure, there is still discipline and a fighting for the cause of truth, but love has long gone. In particular, it seems as though the Ephesians are condemned, not so much for a lack of love for each other, but because their first love, love of the Lord himself, has gone cold.

Three issues arise from this brief look at Revelation 2 which relate to some modern marriage problems:

- Many people define love as disinterested actions rather than feelings.
- Many people assume that duty is more important than joy, which may be leading married couples to either despair of recapturing joy in their marriage, or resigning themselves to a marriage relationship which falls far short of the biblical ideal.
- Many Christian people have lost an appreciation of God's ultimate purpose for marriage. This lost perspective means that many couples do not see their relationship worked out in the light of God's ultimate purpose for marriage. (More on this later)

Risk Assessment Discussion

A recent, compulsory requirement, for charities in England is to undertake a risk assessment analysis. We held a church council meeting to discuss this subject. We tried to list





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the kinds of risks which we might face which could bring about financial ruin. We had to decide whether the risks had a high, medium or low probability of occurring. We then had to decide the likely impact these risks would have, should they occur.

The brainstorming revealed a number of familiar problems, such as loss of key staff workers; death of significant financial contributors, the impact of nuclear holocaust or earthquake! One wise gentleman on the council pointed out that the thing which could be considered both high probability and high impact would be 'a loss of vision, or complacency by the congregation'.

Our discussion was immediately reshaped. Our prime problems as a church do not come from the outside, but rather from within. And, they are also more subtle problems, problems which creep in, rather than attack you with the ferocity and aggression of a storm.

How true this is for marriage too! The problems faced by the Ephesian church in Revelation 2 relate to marriage, as well as to our relationship with God. In marriage, the chief risks consist of the loss of joy and the loss of one's first love, rather than sickness, adultery or financial ruin, serious those these issues are. Moreover, though subtle, the problem of complacency or loss of first love, is endemic, even in Christian marriages.

Confronted by the problem of failed Christian marriages, what can the church do about it? How can joy in marriage be revived? Could it be that joy in marriage is part of a more general joylessness in the Christian life?

My research on this issue led me to explore the question: 'How can I, as a husband and church pastor, help revive joy among Christian couples?'





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Perhaps I can tell you a little about my own journey to this point, and the people who have influenced me along the way. There are three people who have helped change me from a typical English Stoic, to a person who believes that matters of the heart are integral, not only to a healthy marriage, but to a healthy relationship with God.

John Piper

John Piper is a prolific author. His most famous book is called *Desiring God*.

He recalls the famous first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. 'What is the chief end of man?' to which the traditional answer is: 'To glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. Piper argues, this statement feels a bit weak, as if the enjoyment of God is an added extra to glorifying God. It would be better to answer the question: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.'²

The significance of this change in wording is to signal the fact that we enjoy things that we truly value highly. This is essential in the realm of glorifying God too, and is not an added extra.

If you think about it for a moment, this statement about man's chief end, could also be applied to God himself. In his book *The Pleasures of God* (1991), Piper points out that God does everything to bring himself pleasure. Indeed 'God's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever.' God takes delight in his Son; he has so made creation to bring him pleasure and glory; he sovereignly elects, so that peoples from every nation will come to bring him glory. Indeed God does all things for his own pleasure.³

The reason you exist is to bring glory to God by making God your highest delight and your first love. The liberating





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thing about this truth is that your desire for happiness is not at odds with your quest for God. God wants us to find our chief end in God and our highest delight in God.

Piper illustrates the point as follows: Suppose it is my wedding anniversary. I return from work with a beautiful bouquet of two dozen red roses. My wife falls into my arms and exclaims, 'Simon, they are beautiful, you really shouldn't have!' I immediately stop her and retort, 'No, don't thank me, this is just what is expected of me on our wedding anniversary, I am just doing my duty – don't thank me, m'am, I'm just doing my job!'

Well, any romantic moment has immediately been deflated by such a comment! However, if I reply, 'My darling, I love you, and nothing gives me greater pleasure than to give you these roses', she will know that my motivation glorifies her and dignifies the moment. She is not going to turn to me and say, 'Simon, what is the matter with you? This moment is not about *your* pleasure and joy.' She knows that by finding my joy in this act, I am showing how much I honour her.

Consider the following scriptural passages:

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4).

Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, Rejoice (Phil. 4:4).

God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

John Piper comments:

Sin is pursuing happiness where it cannot be lastingly found (Jeremiah 2:12ff.), or pursuing it in the right direction, but with lukewarm, half-hearted affections (Revelation 3:16). Virtue, on the other hand, is to do what we do with all our might in pursuit of the enjoyment of all that God is for us in Jesus . . . My discovery is that God is supreme not where he is simply served with duty but where he is savoured with delight.⁴





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Already, we can see that John Piper's teaching helps address the question of dutiful but joyless marriages. But, Piper isn't the first to have taught this, and I think he is right to see it in scripture. C. S. Lewis has been a strong influence on him, especially in the things which Lewis has to say about the matter of praise.

C. S. Lewis

Lewis comments he had noticed that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising.

The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about . . . I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.⁵

In his essay, 'The Weight of Glory', Lewis comments that the problem with most of us is that we are more likely to be too stoical in our emotional reactions to God, rather than overemotional:

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.⁶

Jonathan Edwards

Far more influential on John Piper's theology, and on mine too, is the writing of Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-





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century New England Puritan. One writer has commented on Jonathan Edwards' preaching as follows:

For us to see Jonathan Edwards ascend his pulpit today, a candle in one hand and his sermon manuscript in the other, would cause a titter in the congregation. From our modern foam-cushioned church seats, with carpeted aisles and soothing background music, we can scarcely capture the old-time dignity of the unpretentious church where Edwards and others held captive the hearts and minds of their hearers.

When Jonathan Edwards 'uttered' in the Spirit, the expressionless face, the sonorous voice, the sober clothing were forgotten. He was neither a dullard nor a sluggard. His was a devoted heart intent on rightly dividing the word of truth. But in doing it, Edwards flamed.⁷

Edwards made a number of resolutions in his life, one of which was:

Resolved, to endeavour to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigour and vehemence, yea, violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.⁸

He observes that true religion is religion of the heart:

The religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in His word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, 'fervent in spirit,' and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion...⁹

This contrasts with the dangers of a hard heart, or a heart which has lost its first love:

Now by a hard heart is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections, like a stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved, and hard to be impressed. Hence the hard heart is called a *stony heart*, and is opposed to a heart of flesh, that has feeling, and is sensibly touched and moved.¹⁰





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We will hear a bit more from each of these three men as we progress through the book. My point here is, if we are going to revive warm-hearted, joyful marriages, we must not be indifferent to our feelings. I am sure that we are agreed that feelings can mislead, and we should not live by feelings alone. But we certainly shouldn't go to the opposite extreme and assume that emotion, enthusiasm and delight is restricted to the Oval or Twickenham or Wembley. That which is most worthy of our worship is *most* worthy of our whole being, heart, soul, and mind, as Jesus' summary of the law asserts (see Mark 12:30). Similarly, if true love is to be shown in marriage, then, the heart must be moved by passion and joy.

What is the Cure?

So what is the answer for the church (or marriage) which is zealous but loveless?

The answer to this question is found in Revelation 2. Jesus called the Ephesian church to return to its first love. Many of the principles for restoring love towards God apply equally to the restoration of dutiful but joyless marriages:

Remember

Remember what it was that first incited love for the Lord. A loveless marriage would do well to get out the wedding video; to recount times together eating leisurely meals; talking about issues of the heart; or doing something especially for their own relationship.

Do you remember your first love? Was it not true that you did not need to *do* anything together, you simply wanted to *be* with each other. You wanted to spend every waking moment in each other's presence. Just ask your parents

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to remind you of the cost of the phone bill when they had teenagers in the house!

Is my joy in God? Is he my highest delight? I suggest that when you first believed, he was. Similarly, is your first love – not your football, your mates, your gym, your children or grandchildren – but your spouse? Everything else has its place, but, only after we remember our first love. In later chapters we will consider how this ‘first love’ can be rekindled in marriage.

Repent

Repentance is both saying and being sorry. It is a change of attitude which leads to a change in direction. I think of a clergy friend who, for the sake of his marriage, had to completely reorganize the way in which the vicarage was used by the parish. He moved meetings away from the home – and made sure he didn’t go to all of them – so that he could give his family the time they needed. For him, saying sorry to his neglected family was important, but there was also positive action that demonstrated that repentance, in the reordering of his priorities. Again, we shall look at some of these principles later.

I notice with interest that the thing that the Ephesians are to repent of is their lovelessness. Jesus doesn’t talk about ‘falling out of love’, but rather: ‘forsaking their first love’. When everyone else was wondering around our wedding reception kissing the beautiful bride and wishing us good luck, one lady whispered in my ear, ‘Work hard at it!’ It seemed strange at the time, but I am sure it was good advice.

Revive or be Removed!

You need to work hard to keep the fires of your heart warm with affection for God. This involves thinking about his





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character and love. It involves thinking about the things that first drew you to him.

There are many practical exercises in this book. However, I do not apologize for the fact that there is also quite a bit of 'theology'. This is a scary word. However, all it means is 'knowledge of God'. In other words, if God made marriage, if God uses marriage as an example of his relationship with his people, and if he expects it to be swallowed up in some bigger eternal purpose, then we need to know *God* better in order to revive our marriages!

The challenge of this passage for the Ephesian church is plain. Either their cold heart is warmed up and their hard heart is softened, or their light is removed. Of course, Jesus will continue to shine, but in a loveless, dead church, his witness will be removed. He'll knock their lights out! I am sorry to say that is precisely what happened in Ephesus. There is nothing more than a pile of ruins there now. But there is a promise to the conquerors – overcomers – that they will be allowed to eat from the tree of life again! (Gen 37; cf. 3:22, and Rev. 22:14-15).

Things can easily slip in our relationship with God. Similarly, things can easily slip in our relationships with one another.

John Piper issues a word of warning. If I do not feel joy in life and ministry, then I should not continue, stoically, but rather I should repent:

[Do not simply] get on with your duty because feelings are irrelevant! My answer has three steps. First, confess the sin of joylessness. Acknowledge the culpable coldness of your heart . . . Second, pray earnestly that God would restore the joy of obedience. Third, go ahead and do the outward dimension of your duty in the hope that the doing will rekindle the delight.¹¹





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In the next chapter we shall look at the biblical foundation for a view of marriage which keeps love alive. There is a consistent theme running through the Bible, namely, that God wants intimacy with his people, and that he knows we will be most satisfied in him when we foster that. Marriage is regularly used as an illustration of that intimate relationship, it is a living, breathing, enactment or parable of this kind of love. As we examine the creation accounts of man and woman, we shall look back and remember the height from which we have fallen! Then we shall look forward, beyond God's redemptive work to the final consummation, where we shall enjoy the intimacy with God which the best marriages anticipate.

Fairy Story or Bible Story

The children's film *Shrek* is a wonderful satire on the traditional fairy tale. Once upon a time, there was a terrifying ogre called Shrek. He enjoyed his own company in a dismal swamp. He is furious when his land is invaded by fairy tale characters, escaping the beastly Lord Farquaad. He is joined by the irritating, but eventually loveable, donkey played by Eddie Murphy.

He treks off to confront Lord Farquaad. But before Lord Farquaad will get rid of the unwanted visitors to his swamp, Shrek has to go and rescue Princess Fiona (played by Cameron Diaz) from the dragon-protected fortress, and try to persuade her to marry Lord Farquaad.

Of course, along the way, Shrek falls in love with the princess, and, in fact they do live happily ever after! Then, in *Shrek 2*, the comic fairy tale continues!

Many people's view of marriage is shaped by Hollywood, rather than by the Bible. Fairy tale weddings often don't end up 'happily ever after'.





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The Bible account of marriage begins, not with the words 'Once upon a time' but with the words, 'In the beginning, God' (Gen. 1:1). This is no fairy tale, and the happiness promised is not in a romantic, idealistic view of human nature, but rather, in an appreciation that the God who made us, also knows what is best for us.

When making a film or animation, the narrative is usually depicted, scene by scene, on a storyboard. The storyboard gives the main theme of the film and helps the producer and actors get a feel for the overall sequence of the whole film. What would the storyboard look like if we were to make a film about the biblical story of marriage?

Scene 1 – Made in God's Image (Gen. 1:26–28)

Genesis 1:26–28

26 Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

As admiring friends coo into the buggy of a newborn baby, they are often heard to say, 'Isn't he like his father?'

The climax to the creation account reminds us that only human beings *image* God. You get a glimpse of what God is like by looking at the hills, the stars, the plant life, or the animal kingdom. But, you see much more of what God is like when you look in the mirror. In human beings, you see a reflection of something of God's own character.





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The Image Implies Fruitfulness

In the Ancient Near East, vassal kings would multiply small clay images of themselves and place them at strategic points all across the land. By multiplying images of himself, people were to remember who he is and the vastness of his kingdom. Humans are encouraged to make more images of God, not by removing the rib from the husband's side, but through procreation.

The Image Involves Dominion

The vassal king had another purpose in multiplying his image throughout the land. It served to remind people that wherever they saw his image, there he reigned. So too, human beings show something of God's reign in the way they image him. Men and women do this by creatively ruling the creation.¹²

We shall need to spend some time considering what being 'made in God's image' has to do with living out our married life today.

Genesis 2:22-25

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man.'

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Scene 2 – Made Especially for Each Other (Gen. 2:23-25)

Notice the effort which God went to make woman. She was not formed from the dust of the earth, rather, Eve – the handmaid – was hand made! People sometimes say of





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a young couple who are evidently in love: 'Aren't they made for each other?' There is more than one level to interpret that truth! What more do we learn about the married relationship of the first couple in these verses?

Marriage is for Intimacy

There was no suitable companion for Adam in the rest of creation. But, in Eve, Adam found the answer to loneliness, and a genuine partnership in the work God had given Adam to do in the garden. He exclaimed: 'at last, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh'. The language used implies a wonderful intimacy. Matthew Henry poetically comments:

Not made out of his head to top him;
Nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him;
But out of his side to be equal with him,
under his arm to be protected,
and near his heart to be loved.¹³

Marriage is for Offspring

Consider these two statements: 'Love-making is the recreation of the species.' 'Love-making is the re-creation of the species.' Both are true.

God could have said, 'Now you're not going to like this, but in order for the human race to continue, you must engage in sexual intercourse!' However, God chose to make love-making one of the most pleasurable of human experiences, celebrated in other parts of the Bible, such as Song of Songs, and intended to be enjoyed in the context of the relationship for which he has designed it.





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Marriage is Forever

The phrase, 'one flesh' literally means 'stuck', implying that in marriage, you are 'stuck with each other'! However the Bible means that in a positive sense. Yes, there are circumstances when this glue can be dissolved, but that is not the created intention of the glue! We will see more about the implications of 'one flesh' language later.

Genesis 3:1-8

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'

2 The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,

3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'

4 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman.

5 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Scene 3 – God's Good Creation is Spoiled by Sin (Gen. 3)

In Genesis 1–2 everything in the garden is rosy. Even today there is a longing in the human heart to 'go back to Eden'. In Genesis 4 we are shown a picture of the world as we know





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it, full of anger, jealousy, mistrust, murder. How did we get there? The answer is found in Genesis 3.

Adam and Eve Fall for Satan's Lie (vv. 1–7)

Satan attacks on two fronts. He encourages Adam and Eve to doubt God's word, implying that God is nothing more than a killjoy (vv. 1–2). Further, he encourages them to doubt God's Goodness (vv. 5–6).

Adam and Eve were given the freedom to love God and enjoy open communication with him. Love cannot be coerced. There had to be some test to that love (theologians call it 'probation'). But they failed the test.

Genesis 3:9-23

9 But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'

10 He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'

11 And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?'

12 The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'

16 To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'

17 To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree





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about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

22 And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.'

23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

The Consequences of Sin (vv. 8ff.)

When they heard God walking in the garden, they hid from his presence. What a contrast to the naked, unblushing intimacy of chapter 2! They were ashamed in his presence; thinking they could hide from God. Then they tried to knock him off the scent (v. 10). Finally, they blame each other (vv. 12ff.). Adam said, 'The women you gave me...' Eve responded, 'The serpent deceived me.' As the old joke goes: 'Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on!'

There is a constant tendency in human relationships, particularly in the so-called 'battle of the sexes', for each to blame the opposite gender for all relationship ills. And there is a failure to square up to the sin which self-evidently is in everyone's life.





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The Spoiling Effect of Sin (vv. 14ff.)

The serpent is cursed by God (vv. 14ff.) and ultimately will be crushed. The woman will experience pain in childbirth (v. 16) and the loving complementarity of Genesis 2:23ff. will turn into tyranny and rule. The woman will continue to desire her husband but, rather than giving the godly lead she wants, he exercises dominion over her.

The curse on the man (vv. 17ff.) turns work (a good thing) into toil. This is something we experience in our love/hate relationship with work.

The intimacy the couple once enjoyed with God, and with each other is, for now, lost (v. 24). This is not the end of the story, of course, and even in Genesis there are several indications of God's mercy and grace – he calls them, he promises to crush Satan, and he clothes them – but for now we need to move on in our grand Bible Story.

Scene 4 – God, the Bridegroom; His People, the Bride

There are several Old Testament references (for example, Proverbs 2:16ff.; Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 7:34; Ezekiel 16:8; Song of Songs; Malachi 2:14) which include an extended marriage allegory. In this picture/parable, God is likened to the longsuffering bridegroom, initiating and sustaining a covenant relationship. His lovely, but often wayward, bride is the people of Israel. The poetic book Song of Songs has evoked many differences of opinion among biblical scholars as to how much the allegory speaks of the human love between couples, and how much it refers to God's covenant relationship with his people. Whatever the answer to these questions, it is clear that the love and delight which the couple experience points to God's tender, wooing love, towards his





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people. Only God shows the kind of everlasting love to which Song of Songs points. And, God shows the exclusive covenant jealousy spoken of in the first two commandments (8:6–7).

Scene 5 – Idolatry as Spiritual Adultery

The book of Hosea is the account of a man called Hosea who marries a wayward woman called Gomer. Gomer commits adultery and conceives illegitimate children. Hosea finds her and redeems her from slavery. Gomer said that she loved Hosea, but she ended up breaking Hosea's heart, again and again.

In a similar way, God showed unstinting love towards Israel (chapter 11), but they returned it with immorality and idolatry, leading to God judging them (chapters 12–13). Interweaved throughout this story is the account of Israel's flirtatious relationships with the gods of this world, and God's consistent love.

Like Hosea, God sought to woo back his wayward bride (chapter 14). Throughout the whole account of Hosea, we marvel at the constant show of steadfast, covenant love, a love which takes wayward Israel back. Despite their great rebellion, God shows his amazing commitment to this marriage.

Scene 6 – Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride

In the New Testament there are several illustrations of the kind of intimate relationship which Christ has with his people. The most famous parable illustrating the marriage relationship is that of the ten virgins waiting for the return of the bridegroom (although not all commentators agree that the bridegroom here is Christ).

More clear, though, is John the Baptist's description of





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Jesus in John 3:22–36. John makes the point that he is just like the best man, helping the groom get ready for his big day. But when the day arrives, the best man fades into the background so that the groom can come and take his bride.

One final illustration in this section, is the famous Ephesians 5:22ff. passage (which we shall look at in more detail later). For now we will restrict our comments to the way in which the marriage relationship is worked out in Christ's relationship with the church, as spoken of in Ephesians 5:31–32:

'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.

There has been a lot of discussion about the meaning of Paul's phrase 'profound mystery'. The Roman Catholic Church takes this to refer to a sacramental view of marriage. However, this explanation does not help make sense of why Paul takes Genesis 2:24 to refer to Christ and the church, not the human institution of marriage.

Others think that the mystery refers to the union of Christ and the church. In other words, the prime focus of the whole passage is not human marriage, but the allegorical relationship between Christ and the church. However, is there nothing in Ephesians 5:22ff. to learn about human marital relationships?

Better, I think, is to understand 'mystery' as referring to human marriage as a kind of parable of the relationship between Christ and the church. The 'mystery' Paul alludes to would then refer to the 'deeper meaning' of Genesis 2:24, namely, that beyond human marriage, there is a marvellous picture of the divine marriage between Christ and his people.





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Clearly this has a lot of implications for Christian marriage which we shall come to later.

What can already be deduced, though, is that to get a full biblical picture of marriage it will involve the 'looking back' and 'looking forward' we referred to in the section on the church in Ephesus, in the last chapter. We need to look back to God's created intention (Gen. 1 and 2); we also need to look forward to the completion of God's work in heaven (the book of Revelation).

To complete our brief Bible survey, let us look at the last few chapters of the Bible story, the book of Revelation.

Scene 7 – The Climax of God's Saving Work will be the Marriage Feast of the Lamb

When quizzed by the Sadducees about the married state of those who are in heaven, Jesus replied, 'At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven' (Matt. 22:30). Clearly, in Jesus' mind, there is something temporary about marriage – it is only 'until death do us part'.

In Revelation 19, the scene is one of great rejoicing, because at last, there will be the marriage ceremony between Christ (the lamb) and the bride (the church – see v. 7). We eagerly anticipate the day when God's work among his people will be completed (22:17), and both the church as we know it, and marriage as we know it, will be swallowed up in the creation of the new heaven and the new earth (see Revelation 21).

The Diamond Marriage Course

Our focus here has been the Bible Tale about Marriage, not the Fairy Tale Marriage. Clearly, from this brief survey of





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what the Bible teaches about the subject, we can see that marriage matters very much to God. Marriage is not just the stuff of fairy tales. Marriage is a human enterprise, which God presides over, and through which God gives eloquent testimony to the world of his eternal purposes! Indeed, as the Church of England Book of Common Prayer advises, not only is the marriage service something which is conducted in the sight of God, but,

[it] is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, discreetly advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

According to the Prayer Book, marriage is ordained by God, for the procreation of children, for a remedy against sin and for the mutual help and comfort of the partners.¹⁴ One should assume, in the light of this brief survey, that Christian couples have a responsibility to foster such a marriage relationship which will give a living picture of the kind of relationship which Christ has fostered with his bride, the church.

It is because I believe that this is a very important theme in the Bible that I have developed a course to help Christian couples live by these principles. The course is called 'The Diamond Marriage', and will be outlined in the rest of this book.

Husband ————— Wife

Figure 1

Horizontal Implications

The purpose of the sixweek course is to enable Christian couples to develop an understanding of marriage which appreciates both its created intention, and which fosters and maintains joy. Initially, I have discovered, many couples





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look upon their marriage purely in terms of a 'horizontal' relationship, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Vertical Implications

However, as we shall come to see, there are a number of biblical passages which encourage us to perceive marriage as a triangle, with the Lord as the inextricable third party to a healthy Christian marriage. This is illustrated by the triangle in Figure 2.

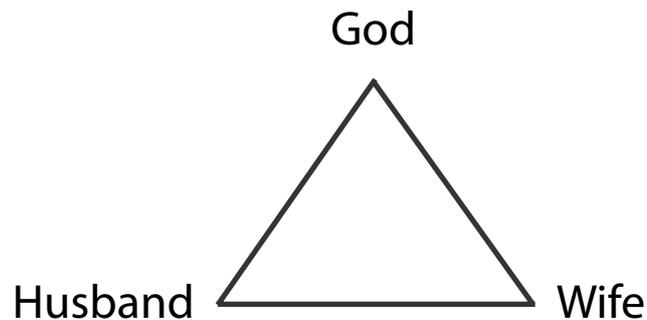


Figure 2

Eternal Implications

Ultimately, however, we will see that the complete biblical picture of marriage is not a triangle, but rather a diamond. This is illustrated by Figure 3 (see overleaf). This diagram illustrates the fact that marriage is to be viewed, not just horizontally and vertically, but also, eternally. By understanding more of the eternal purpose of marriage, couples should be able to use their marriage to relate to the world as God intended.

It is my hope that we shall move towards an appreciation of Christian marriage as a diamond. The diamond marriage is one where husband, wife, the Lord and the witness of the marriage to the world, are held together in order to show





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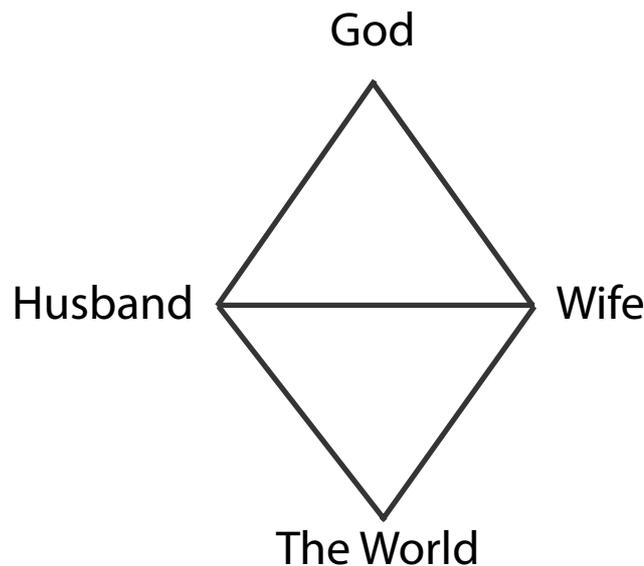


Figure 3

God's ultimate purpose to unite all things in the glorification of his Son.

If this perspective on marriage is grasped, I believe that it will help a couple arrive at their diamond wedding, not only still married – but joyful! This is no fairy tale.

And so we turn to the details of the story...

¹ The figures referred to are taken from the Barna Group website (www.barna.org), research carried out in America. Overall, 33 percent of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce, which is statistically identical to the 34 percent incidence among non-born again adults.

² J. Piper, *Desiring God*, Leicester: IVP, 1986, pp. 1ff.

³ J. Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991.

⁴ Piper, *Desiring God*, pp. 398–9.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1987, pp. 80–1.





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⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, New York: Harper Collins, 2000, p. 26.

⁷ <http://www.ravenhill.org/edwards.htm>

⁸ J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998, vol. I, pp. 753–9.

⁹ J. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994, p. 27.

¹⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 46.

¹¹ Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 221.

¹² I am indebted to Richard Pratt for this insight. See *Designed for Dignity*, Phillipsburg: P and R Publishing, 1993

¹³ M. Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible; Genesis–Deuteronomy*, Iowa Falls: Word Bible Publishers (no date), vol. 1, p.20

¹⁴ The Alternative Service Book and Common Worship place companionship higher up the priority list than procreation, which is interesting, but not our main point here.

