

# Marriage: A Gift From Eden



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:18–25, Mark 10:7–9, Eph. 5:22–25, Matt. 5:27–30.*

**Memory Text:** “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him’ ” (*Genesis 2:18*).

Think of the blessings of a happy marriage and a loving home. How fortunate are those who have such an experience! Unfortunately, for too many people marriage has been an experience of mostly pain and anger rather than of joy and peace. This is not how it was intended or how it should be. The sad state of so many marriages is a powerful expression of the degradation that sin has brought to the human race.

“God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. ‘Marriage is honorable’ (*Hebrews 13:4*); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

What a wonderful ideal. This week’s lesson looks at some of the principles behind it.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 2.*

## *Lo Tov*

Out of a primeval abyss God created our world through the supernatural power of His Word. All through the Creation account, everything was “good” until the work was completed, at which point everything the Lord had created was pronounced “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*).

**In** the midst of all this, however, one thing was *lo tov*, “not good.” Read **Genesis 2:18**. What was “not good,” and why? What are some of the implications of this text?

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God had declared all aspects of the Creation “good” up to the time that He created Adam. At that point, Adam was the only human. Although he was made in the image of God, in his aloneness he could not reflect the full image of God, who exists in relationship with other parts of the Godhead. The Godhead, of course, is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Adam needed someone like himself with whom he could form a relationship of mutual love and cooperation, reflecting the loving relationship exemplified within the Godhead.

**Read** **Genesis 2:19–21**. After what act does God cause Adam to sleep and then, from his flesh, create a wife? How might the previous act be related to God’s creation of a wife for Adam?

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Perhaps the key here is found in the last phrase of verse 20. As he named the animals, Adam must have noticed that they came in pairs (male and female), unlike himself, who was a singular creation. We can be sure that the Lord all along intended for Adam to have a wife. Perhaps the Lord intended to create a longing in Adam, the sense that something was missing in his own existence, which would make him that much more appreciative of the gift that the Lord was going to give him in a wife.

**Consider the contrast between the “good” of the rest of the Creation and the declaration of “not good” in regard to Adam’s solitude. What does this indicate about the value of relationships? What can you do to help to strengthen whatever valuable relationships that you are in now?**

## A Companion for Adam

Genesis 2:20, in which Adam names the animals, helps to reveal the great gap between humans and other earthly creatures. There was no animal that was comparable to Adam. Not even among the apes was there any creature like Adam, because Adam was not like an ape. This is an important point for us to remember because so many in our society promote the idea that humans are nothing more than advanced apes. We are not apes, and an ape was no more suitable as a companion for Adam than it would be for one of us.

**Read** Genesis 2:21, 22. What significance is found in the method by which God created a companion for Adam?

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As God had personally crafted Adam’s body from the dust of the ground, so He personally crafted Eve’s body, using one of Adam’s ribs. God did not need Adam’s rib to create Eve; He could have created her as He had created Adam or even spoken her into existence.

But God had a reason for forming Eve out of one of Adam’s ribs. If the two had been created completely separately, it could indicate that by nature they were completely independent individuals. But the sharing of flesh in both persons indicates that the two were to be united and were intended to be “one flesh.”

After being created, Eve was brought to Adam to be his helper (*vs. 18*). She was made from Adam (*vs. 22*) and given to Adam (*vs. 22*). The process by which God created Eve showed clearly that God could provide any companion that Adam needed. This point became important later when Adam faced the temptation of whether to join Eve in the eating of the fruit or to trust God to take care of the situation. Adam had ample reason to believe that God could take care of him, and this made his sin the more grievous.

**Read** Genesis 2:23. What was Adam’s response to Eve?

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Adam was so excited when he saw Eve that he sang out in poetry. This is the first poem in the Bible and reflects Adam’s regard for his wife and the closeness of their relationship. She was to be his equal, another aspect of Creation that was damaged by the Fall.

## Ideal Marriage

Author William Faulkner once called marriage a “failure” and wrote that “the only way to get any peace out of it is . . . to keep the first one [wife] and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her.” What a sad commentary on the state of many marriages.

**Read** Mark 10:7–9. What texts did Jesus quote in this passage? What characteristics of a good marriage can be found here in the words of Jesus?

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The benefits of leaving one’s parents in order to create a home with one’s spouse are so well known that they hardly need to be mentioned. Problems with in-laws are one of the leading causes of marital discord. One of the first steps to take when establishing a happy home is to respect the independence of the marriage partners by the establishment of a home separate from their parents when at all possible. In cases when it is not possible, the privacy and intimacy of marriage should still be respected.

Unity is another feature of a good marriage. Unity does not mean that the two partners should give up the use of their separate brains but that they should be united in their purpose to do the very best for each other and for their union.

Jesus also emphasized the lasting nature of marriage. Marriage is not a casual relationship to be entered into or dismissed at will. It is a lifetime commitment. Those who are not prepared to commit themselves for life should postpone such a step until they are ready.

**Read** Ephesians 5:22–25. In what ways do these verses reveal the principles of a good marriage?

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It is the husband’s privilege to give himself to his wife in loving service, as Christ gave Himself for the church. In turn, the wife is to respect her husband and to cooperate in their work toward their mutual goals. Here is the solution to the discord that sin has brought into the marriage relationship. Self-sacrificing love will be met by loving respect and mutual happiness. Our homes can be a foretaste of heaven.

## Protecting What's Precious

One of the greatest examples of God's love for humanity can be found in human sexuality. It is truly a wonderful gift from God. Yet, as with all the gifts that we have been given, it doesn't come unconditionally. That is, it's not something we can just do with as we please. God has set some rules. Indeed, He is very clear: sexual activity is to be between a husband and wife, male and female, and only in the context of marriage. Anything outside of that is sin.

**Read** Matthew 5:27–30. Look at how seriously Jesus takes the issues with which He is dealing here. What is, ultimately, at stake?

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However much we like to focus (and rightly so) on all the grace and forgiveness that Jesus bestows upon sinners, we can't forget the high standards of morality that He lived and preached. It's hard to imagine how Jesus could have expressed more strongly the warning against sexual immorality as revealed in these few verses. Plucking out your eye? Cutting off your hand? If this is what it takes to be pure, then it's worth it; otherwise, you are in danger of losing your eternal life.

"If all who profess to obey the law of God were free from iniquity, my soul would be delivered; but they are not. Even some who profess to keep all the commandments of God are guilty of the sin of adultery. What can I say to arouse their benumbed sensibilities? Moral principle, strictly carried out, becomes the only safeguard of the soul."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, pp. 621, 622.

**However strong Jesus' warning is here, we must not forget the story about the woman caught in the act of adultery (*John 8: 1–11*). How do we strike the right balance between the upholding of the standards that Jesus talked about in the above verses, while at the same time showing grace and compassion to those who fall, as revealed in this story?**

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## Marriage as a Metaphor for the Church

It is well-known among students of the Bible that, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, marriage is used as a symbol of the relationship between God and His covenant people. That's why, for example, on numerous occasions the Bible uses the image of an unfaithful woman to symbolize the apostasy and backsliding that were prevalent in ancient Israel. For instance, back in Exodus the Lord said to His people that they should not enter into any kind of close relationship with the pagans around them because the pagans were a very perverse people who could lead Israel astray.

**Read** Exodus 34:15, 16. What image does the Lord use in this specific warning? How can this be understood in the context of God's people being "married" to Him? See Jer. 3:14.

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At the same time, the image of the church as the bride of Christ points toward unity among believers and with Christ, especially when understood in the context of the biblical ideal for marriage: one man and one woman in a loving, self-sacrificing relationship.

**Read** Ephesians 5:28–32 and Revelation 19:5–9. What are these texts teaching?

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In these texts, the relationship within the ideal marriage is compared with the relationship of God and His people. God invites His people to join with Him in an intimate relationship. This is an amazing picture of God's interest in His people and His desire to bring us into His fellowship.

**What choices can you make that will draw you closer to the Lord and closer to the ideal represented in the biblical concept of marriage? Why is it a matter of the choices that you, and you alone, can make?**

**Further Study:** In many ways a proper understanding of morality, especially sexual morality, is clearly tied to a proper understanding of our origins. For example: evolutionary philosophy does not provide an objective basis for any link between sexual activity and morality. Animals have many different types of “mating systems.” Some species are polygamous; many are promiscuous. A few species are mostly monogamous, but genetic studies have revealed that many species that appear to be monogamous are not actually so. In many species, a female may give birth to a group of offspring that are not all fathered by the same individual. Without the objective standard of morality given by the Creator, we would have no basis for the evaluation of sexual behavior as morally good or bad. The current push to approve homosexual partnerships illustrates this point. It is only in the light of Creation that marriage is properly understood.

“In both the Old and the New Testament, the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father’s house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Darwinism denies anything like the biblical Creation. What rules for sexual behavior, if any, does Darwinism provide, and how do they contrast with the biblical ideal?
- ❷ What are some biblical examples of good marriages and happy homes? Name some biblical examples of unhappy marriages and homes. What can we learn from both?
- ❸ Review the description of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31:10–31. What should be the character of the husband of such a wife?
- ❹ In what ways can your local church be a place that can help to affirm and strengthen the ideals of marriage? What practical things can your church do in order to accomplish that goal?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 2:18, 21–24*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize and understand God’s Creation design for marriage.

**Feel:** Reverently consider what God’s Creation design means for marriage.

**Do:** Seek to use his or her personal power in marriage (and in life) as Christ modeled in Philippians 2.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Leave, Cleave, and Be One Flesh**

**A** What are God’s designs for marriage before it is entered into?

**B** What are God’s designs for marriage itself once it is entered into?

**II. Feel: Reverence for God’s Design for Marriage**

**A** The final act of Creation design made some changes to marriage to accommodate humanity’s fallen condition. How does the post-Fall design help to instill reverence for marriage?

**B** In Ephesians 5, Paul outlines principles for mutual submission in marriage. How are a husband and wife to submit to each other as equals without either spouse feeling inferior or giving into the temptation to dominate?

**III. Do: Humility Before the Lord**

**A** How can you use your personal power in marriage in the way that Christ modeled in Philippians 2?

**B** In what ways can the principles in that same model be applied to other aspects of your life?

► **Summary:** Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were equal partners. Moses makes an inspired moral application from Eden to how we should enter marriage today. There is a critical order to be followed: Leave, Cleave, and Be One Flesh. Paul explains the post-Fall ideal for marriage in Ephesians 5 with the concept of mutual submission.

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Marriage was made in Eden with certain design parameters, which were designed to protect our happiness.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following points to help class members understand that God has a design for them once they enter into marriage, as set forth in Creation.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24*). Here Moses discloses a moral norm for entering marriage, based on God’s creation order.

First, Moses says that the man leaves his parents before being joined to his wife. This condition means that, prior to marrying, a man should establish independence, demonstrating that he can successfully manage his life alone. If he cannot manage himself, how can he manage a marriage?

Second, he cleaves to his wife. The Hebrew word is used in reference to the skin cleaving to the body, thus denoting a strong, permanent bond. But when is this permanent bond fully established? At the wedding. Engagement is not a permanent relationship, for it always ends either in breaking up or in marriage.

Finally, once permanence is established, the element of “one flesh” can be added to the relationship. Saying “No” to desire prior to the establishment of permanence is hard, but the strength of discipline required to wait is the same strength of discipline needed to make the marriage work for a lifetime. Failure to establish this discipline prior to marriage weakens the ability to maintain a permanent union after the wedding. God’s design is that marriage be one enactment of the image of God, illustrating the permanent Oneness of the Trinity after whom we are imaged.

**Opening Activity for Discussion:** As a child, did you ever ruin your Christmas by not waiting to open presents? How does not waiting when we should diminish the joy of the experience that we waited for? Can you think of other examples where something is ruined by a failure to wait?

## ► STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Convey to your students the idea that God created marriage to be a mutually unselfish, self-emptying, loving relationship. Husband and wife were not made to lord over each other.

### Bible Commentary

**I. Marriage: An Enactment of the Image of God** (Read Genesis 2:18, 21–24 with the class.)

In making Eve, God is said to have made a “helper comparable to” Adam (*NKJV*). What kind of “helper” was Eve meant to be? The Hebrew vocabulary means a helper who is a counterpart to someone, on the same level. This shows that Eve was meant to be an equal to Adam in the Creation order. (Ellen G. White takes this view, as well; see *The Adventist Home*, p. 25 and *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.)

But with sin, a change appears. Eve is told, “Your desire shall be for your husband” (*Gen. 3:16, NKJV*). The text only states that she was to be subordinate to *her* husband. Eve was not subjugated to men in general, for the text addresses only the family economy. It does not address gender relations at large. Ellen G. White notes, however, that “had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter, and made her life a burden.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 115. What, then, does this verse in Genesis about subordination mean?

In Ephesians 5, Paul takes the Creation order and expounds upon the post-Fall ideal for marriage. He first calls us to practice mutual submission (*vs. 21*)—“submit[ting] to one another out of reverence for Christ” (*ESV*)—but husband and wife will submit in differing ways. Verse 22 continues Paul’s thought, literally reading, “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord” (*NKJV*). Paul directly addresses the wife, as he does in Colossians 3:18, in which he further admonishes that the wife must determine when submission is appropriate. By addressing the wife directly, Paul is calling for the *voluntary* submission of the wife as an *equal* and not to the involuntary subservience of an inferior. Paul never calls husbands to supervise their wives’ submission. This being the case, how is the husband to submit to his wife?

Paul explains this in Ephesians 5:25–29. The husband is not called to rule his wife but to love her as Christ loves the church. Christ loves

the church with self-emptying, self-sacrificial love. Instead of using His divinity to lord His authority over the church, He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” (*Phil. 2:7, ESV*). For Paul, Philippians 2 is a code of ethics for Christian behavior. In marriage, then, just as Christ emptied Himself of His divine rights and privileges to self-sacrificially serve us, so the husband is called to do the same with his wife. Her needs and well-being should be more important to him than his own privileges and conveniences.

This is the kind of husband to whom a wife can safely submit! God’s ideal is that both parties submit to each other but in differing ways. When properly practiced, this post-Fall ordinance makes marriage a blessing to both.

**Consider This:** God never intended husbands and wives to exercise selfish or tyrannical power over each other, even after the Fall. In what way does your use of your personal power reflect Christ’s example in Philippians 2?

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** God’s design for marriage should not demean or degrade your marriage partner.

#### Thought Questions:

❶ In Ephesians 5, what does mutual submission mean today for husbands (men focus here) and wives (women focus here)?

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❷ Why does Paul not instruct husbands to supervise their wives in the area of mutual submission?

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❸ Paul applies the principles of Philippians 2:5–7 as a general code of ethics for Christians to follow (see 1 Corinthians 9, for example, where Paul has

rights but refuses to exercise them in order to accomplish nobler goals). Ephesians 5 applies these ethics especially to husbands, though the wife is not excluded.

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4 How can you be more sacrificial and self-emptying in your use of your personal power with your spouse, children, and community?

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### ► **STEP 4**—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Obedience to God’s norms in a sinful world does not guarantee that all marriages so founded will automatically succeed. The blight of sin and the function of free will prevent a guaranteed result, but obedience does increase your odds of success.

**Activity for Discussion:** In class, talk about what marriage must have been like before sin entered. What principles must have ruled the relationship? In what ways could a married couple reflect those principles?

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