

Restoring Hope To Your Marriage

Written by

Friday, 29 January 2010 11:08 - Last Updated Friday, 29 January 2010 12:17



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Paul J. Bucknell

How would you answer the question, “What makes a great marriage?” Many people have difficulty describing the elements of a wonderful marriage. Many of these couples haven’t even seen a great marriage in operation. No wonder great marriages are so rare. We haven’t seen them. We can’t even define what it is like!

If we took a survey, we would discover that a good many couples to some degree have given up hope on their marriage. We are not only speaking of the divorced or separated, but on those that are still together. Perhaps you are one of those spouses who have given up hope that things will get better. You are not alone.

There are signs that tell the story of your lost hope. Heart signs include taking ones marriage for granted and general discontent. All excitement or delight in your partner is something in the past. A spouse is disrespectful to the other. These things are followed up by other more tragic signs that include imagination flings, pornography or actual sexual affairs. When one is not content at home, he goes elsewhere to be distracted and more often than not attracted to someone or something else.

But things were different before, weren't they? Despite signs that things were not perfect between you and your fiancé, you were willing to overlook the imperfections. You were willing to commit your life and all that you had to one another. This is because you had hope. You

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believed those problems were next to nothing in comparison to being married to that special one. Perhaps being a bit naïve, you thought the problems would solve themselves just by being married. Those who have been married can now see that marriage actually intensifies rather than solves the problems! But is giving up hope the solution? Certainly not!

Restoration of hope is the theme of this session. **Hope does not solve problems, but it does put us on the right track so we can work out the many big and small difficulties that we face in our marriages.**

Without hope, you and I will avoid the problems until catastrophic decisions are made further eroding the marriage relationship.

Some have suggested that it is good for spouses to argue. They mean, I think, that at least these couples still have some hope left for their marriage. Otherwise they wouldn't fight. This might be true, but it is not helpful to make arguments a sign of life. Instead let us focus on hope. Couples might disagree but they need not argue and fight. Hope will, however, help you become the kind of spouse who will learn how to work with God in your marriage.



This is not God's concept of marriage.

Marriage is not, as most people believe, a mere human agreement with legal ramifications. This is the secular view of marriage. God's Word gives us the accurate perspective. God Himself instituted marriage. God declared the two to be one in Genesis 2:24. Every marriage is divine in nature because of God's creative Word.

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother,
and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

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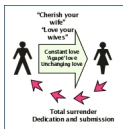
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This is seen even more clearly by the words of Jesus when speaking of marriage in Mark 10:9. Every marriage has been joined together by God. No one should treat marriage as a mere man-made union.



“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Whether a marriage is done in court or in church, a man and woman are taking oaths before the mighty God. In every marriage, then, there are three components: God, husband and wife. When one spouse, therefore, gets serious about God’s part in the marriage, great hope develops. [\[1\]](#) God greatly desires to show His work of grace in every marriage.



This also means that both Christians and unbelievers are all accountable to God for the way they treat their spouses, and generally carry out their marital roles and duties before God. Marriage is not a man-made institution but a divine covenant.

How do we get this hope back? In this session we want to tackle the problem of hopelessness head on. Good changes don’t happen until faith and hope are restored. [\[2\]](#) Only then will you begin to get to the point where your marriage can grow.

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Good marriages follow God's design.

Bad marriages do not follow God's design.

Mediocre marriages have not fully embraced God's design.

We can assume four things from the Bible.

- **God wants to build great marriages.**
- **God has a way to restore a broken marriage.**
- **God works with those who are listening to Him.**
- **God leads us back by living by His design.**

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Always turn to Hope

This is the first step to renew marriages, "Always turn to hope." Many times in your marriage you will face this, "I give up" thought. It is not from god. You can be sure it is a temptation from the evil one. Once we give up on some aspect of our marriage, we tolerate what God considers intolerable. We see this when a man thinks about giving up pornography. He will hear, "You can't do it." "You tried it before." "It won't make a difference." All of these statements support the main goal of the evil one: to make you give up !

A wife might have an over cooked dinner in the oven again. Her husband is not considerate and did not call to let her know he would be home late again. She is thinking of rudely responding. "I'll serve him what he deserves—a burnt supper." "I'll just go out with my 'real' friends. Maybe he will learn to appreciate me." Again, we see how these tempting thoughts are threaded together to cause us to give up hope and respond in sin. [\[3\]](#)

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The Lord always wants us to turn in the direction of hope for it is there we will find strength to do His will.

A Marriage Building Project : Write a 'Hope List'

Now we must get practical. Think of your spouse right now. Each couple has different points where they have given up hope on each other.



These hopes often hide behind our assumptions and expectations of life. In order to complete this assignment, we will need to keep several questions in mind.

(1) How do you identify these areas of lost hope?

These are the areas in which you once had hope. If you were recently married, you will be more aware of some grand expectations of your new marriage. But now through some startling situations they are gone. You have given up hope. Write these hopes and expectations down.

Others have been married for a while. You can best spot these areas of lost hope by your areas of struggle. What are you frustrated about? What do you argue about? Get down to the real root issues. Like the source of a well, your expectations lie down deep below the surface. Some things will take a while before you will detect it. Others are right on your lips! Write them down.

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Let me give you an illustration. Suppose you wanted your wife just to do what you said, but every time you asked her to do something (or so it seemed), she contested you. You don't want to fight with her but more often than not it seems you end up yelling at her. Now bitterness has settled in. You tend to avoid her. You are beginning to give up hope and therefore turn away from her and your commitment to the relationship. Write this hope down, "My wife would submit with a cheerful spirit."

(2) Isn't it too late?

We understand that some things now seem impossible. They have gone too far.

Say you were always hoping that you would be able to talk deeply about the issues of life with your husband, but he never seemed interested. He always busied himself in his own activities. In fact, you are silently bitter about him watching movies instead of wanting to spend time with you. Now you live almost two completely separate lives.

It is not too late just so you are still married and both alive. God wants us to turn to Him for help. It doesn't matter how much time has passed— even twenty years. You can still have hope because you believe God is part of your marriage. God is the God of miracles.

(3) Do we all have areas of hopelessness?

Our loss of hope looks different as we go through different stages of marriage. It seems that even good marriages could be better. We need to see whether or not our expectations are right on (we will examine this more in another lesson). Sometimes our expectations are conjured up by a materialistic and pleasure-seeking world. We must reject these ambitions. More often than not, though, we know when our marriage is missing some key element.

Even in good marriages spouses can give up on an area or two. A husband might be careless about where he drops his dirty laundry. Or maybe one does not do proper hygiene. A wife might worry about finances. A husband might be too free with spending for his own projects and ignoring other needs (or so the wife thinks). Some couples are focusing on crucial areas of need

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while others on less urgent wishes.

One major problem consists of couples not knowing what makes a great marriage. They have no idea what good things can happen in a marriage. But it makes sense. If our parents were not happily married, we do not have a good marriage model. Our search for a great marriage will come step by step. We need first to grow in some areas to be able to see other areas of need. Those couples with good marriages are still taking these same steps, though they will be more refined.

(4) Isn't it dangerous to focus on what we don't have?

The wedding is the bud; marriage is the unfolding of the beautiful flower. Although we are bringing up areas of discontent, it is for a good purpose. We are exposing areas in which God wants to work. By avoiding them, resentment and bitterness arise until crises occur. Through properly dealing with these difficult points a couple can grow in their unity much like a beautiful pearl develops from a grain of sand that irritates an oyster.

Hope reminds us of what ought to be. Hope lives off the power and grace of God. By looking at the problem, we are reacquainted with our inadequacies. By looking to Him for His miraculous grace, we begin to see light to what are very often dark areas of our lives. At the same time we expose bad attitudes that have perhaps perpetuated the lack of growth in a certain area. We are not fighting our spouse but working with God to develop our marriage after His will. Hope inspires prayer and gets us back on track. Note how God works this out in David's own instructions in Psalm 37:3-5.

Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

We take our precious hopes and disappointments and come to God. We focus on our relationship with God and begin to look to Him for solutions. Our trust is in Him and He will begin to cause answers to come about. "Trust also in Him, and He will do it!"

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Truth: Great marriages happen! (Genesis 2:18-25)

As we deal with this issue of hope, we will be confronted head on with a nagging thought, "That is great for him to say. But what about me with my spouse?!"

I have personally heard 'experienced' couples try to pass on a few helpful comments about the facts of real married life to those soon to be married. They are sometimes terribly critical and full of hopelessness. The newlyweds throw off these 'insights' without difficulty and enter marriage. Unfortunately, when the couple faces certain disappointments about their new marriage, they can easily give in to those terrible 'insights' that the experienced couple had previously given them.

Should we feed these new couples despair or hope? Are we being honest when we give them hope? Sure. This doesn't mean that they will not face problems. They will like all of us. We need to work with them so that they learn how to depend upon God's grace that is marvelous enough to work through all the difficulties they will face.

Let's look at four biblical principles that give us hope and confidence for our marriages. There is no better place to go than the Word of God. Here He reveals His view of marriage in Genesis 2:18-25. [\[4\]](#)

#1 God designed marriage (Genesis 2:18-22)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:18-24)

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A perfect person. An ideal location. Adam had everything else he needed. It was from this beautiful situation that God made and shared a certain observation about the first man Adam, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” God had a plan. He was going to make a ‘helper suitable for him.’ In order to develop a deeper appreciation for what God would do, God wisely had Adam become aware of his need by naming all the beasts. Adam became convinced that none of these would do. It is at that point where God steps in and does His own special work! He started off with a rib but then fashioned it into the woman.

After this, God took time to introduce her to Adam much like a matchmaker would. [5](#) God’s match, however, was designed almost from scratch. She was to be a complement to him rather than a competitor. She was a suitable helper.

So God made all the necessary factors leading up to marriage. We sometimes think of marriage simply as the binding relationship and forget about the critical elements that make marriage possible. God didn’t! God made both male and female for the purpose of being together in an intimate and long-lasting relationship.

#2 God designed plurality: male and female (Genesis 2:23)

man	אָדָם	male
woman	אִשָּׁה	female

And the man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man. (Genesis 2:23)

The man was ecstatic. He realized something, which utterly delighted him, was standing beside him. ‘Woman’ was so named because she was taken from man. Women were designed specially suited to work alongside of their husband. There is a similarity between the two genders but with a significant difference despite what modern society is trying to convince us of otherwise.

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This similarity and difference are both seen in the Hebrew words for man and woman. The Hebrew word for wife adds one letter to the end of the word for man (see the chart; remember Hebrew reads in reverse). This is also reflected in the English words for man and woman too. Add a 'wo' to man and we get 'woman.' Or add a 'fe' to male and we get female. [\[6\]](#)

#3 God designed oneness (Genesis 2:24)

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Plurality of the sexes does not make marriage. The term 'one flesh' refers to much more than the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. The phrase 'one flesh' speaks of the relationship as a whole; the sexual union is only one special expression of this.

How do we know this? We can tell there is more to oneness than sexual union by how this oneness is formed and maintained. It is formed by man leaving the jurisdiction of his parents and forming his own separate entity directly under God accompanied by his lifelong female companion. This special union bears fruit in children as we see in the case of Adam and Eve.

#4 God designed His glory to be revealed in marriage (Genesis 2:25)

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25)

Mysterious truths are revealed by the marriage relationship. Two people are extraordinarily but surely joined together to make one. The glory of this new entity is the unhindered transparency of the man and woman. They were not ashamed. It is very possible that the original glory was a light that emanated from them. [\[7\]](#)

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After sin, clothes were given to both man and woman. This showed that the original openness between the original couple could not be easily regained. There were things in the way. This is not true only physically but emotionally and spiritually. The clothes were a foretaste of Christ which would take the stain of separation and rebellion away and provide for us a means to be at one with God and mankind including our spouses. We will later look more carefully at how Paul spoke about this 'oneness' mystery.

We should remember that all of this was pronounced and done before the fall of man. Marriage has been and always will be a grand design for human beings on this earth. We can put away our doubts about whether or not marriage can work out. By God's grace it can and will. A great marriage is not instant though. Because of sin, a lot of extra hard work needs to be put into it. Marriage can always be wonderful even in its infant stages but it always needs to be growing.

Take Home Project

Many of us have expectations of grand things that will occur in the marriage. In most cases these hopes reflect good things that the Lord wants to develop in our marriages. We also become aware of other hopes that we discover later in our marriages. These hopes and expectations become our goals. When they concur with God's Word, we can be sure they are God's goals too. Restoration of marriages come about when we begin to see what God has planned for our marriages.

Disappointment over our expectations leads to frustrations and doubts. Sometimes we question our spouse and at other times we might even doubt God's purpose. We might think, for example, that God has forgotten us. Indeed He hasn't, but it is easy to fall to this temptation when we do not properly handle disappointment.

We should have started working on a list of areas that we lack hope. Added to that are other hopes that have been kept alive. Let's discuss what we can do with that list in the coming days.

□	#1 Wait
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Don't talk right away about your list of how your marriage could be better. It is not meant to be a list on h

#2 Confess

When you have fallen into temptation to giving up, you need to confess your sin to God. It was not God v

#3 Ask

Ask the Lord to restore hope to the very areas that you have given up hope. It might be something so sin

#4 Anticipate

Give God the opportunity to answer your prayer in His time and way. We do this by telling Him and your

#5 Share

It is natural to want to share your list with your spouse. If your spouse asks to hear your list, then you are

Summary

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God is a God of miracles. Even in the most desperate situations, God can work out beautiful and wonderful marriages. Hope is a seed of faith. We are expressing trust in God to work out what is great and wonderful. Hold on to your hope. Think of it as a lifelong process. As you hold onto God and His promises, He surprises us as He breaks through and reveals what is necessary to overcome certain obstacles.

Our hopes are things that we believe should be. It was like Abraham. God spoke to him about having a son of promise. What happened? He didn't arrive until he was 99! I believe that because Abraham gave up his wife twice to other men that God needed to chastise him. God knew of the promise. It was still real but something had to change in Abraham's life before he was to have this promise fulfilled if it wasn't going to be abused. In one sense it is fruitless to discuss why Abraham had to wait so long. He did. Perhaps it could have been shortened if he changed earlier on. He obviously did not see the connection between his sin and the lack of a child. He needed lots of time to change, and God gave it to him.

The great thing about Abraham is that he kept his faith in God that He would keep His promise. And as we all know God did. His hope was greatly rewarded through the birth of Isaac and his descendants. The descendants of Isaac are still seen in the nation of Israel.

We do not always know why our marriages don't improve more quickly. We should not be so quick to blame our partner. More often than not there is something on both sides that is malfunctioning. Our hope enables us to open our heart to God to bring us to higher standards not only in our spouses but in our own lives too! Hopefully it will happen before we are 99 years old like Abraham! The most powerful hope verses in the scriptures are in Romans 4:18-21. They describe Abraham's persistent hope.

"In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and **being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.**"
(Romans 4:18-21)

Behind this whole process is the assumption that God really wants to improve our marriages. He Himself works out the restoration process. We should never forget the means God uses.

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The areas that we have already been blessed in are hopes fulfilled. Some wives take it for granted that their husbands seriously care for the needs of home. They shouldn't. I can point out many men who are spending their income on gambling or drugs. Husbands, on the other hand, should not forget that God has already been working when he sees his wife faithfully cook meals for him and the family. This is becoming more and more rare as wives live independent lives from their husbands.

Developing great marriages is a process. Each stage can be exciting and fun even though trials lurk around every corner. God desires to do many great things through your lives. Open the door of your marriage and your heart and welcome Him into your marriage. Hope sets us in the right way in which we get to see Him wonderfully at work!

Study Questions

1. From the best marriages you know, what makes 'great marriages?' List at least three things.

2. What are some heart signs of a spouse having given up on their marriage?

3. Hope doesn't solve problems, but it
"_____."

4. What are the major differences between the secular and biblical view of marriage?

5. Give one biblical support for the biblical view of marriage and explain.

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- [6.](#) Why are thoughts that lead to 'giving up' on a good marriage always temptation?

- [7.](#) Make sure you have at least 3 or 4 items on your hope list for your marriage? This will become your prayer list.

- [8.](#) How can it help us to look at the areas of discontent in our marriages?

- [9.](#) How do we know God designed marriage and it wasn't just a power control matter for cavemen?

- [10.](#) Why were women named 'woman'?

- [11.](#) Does the 'oneness' God speak of in Genesis 2 refer to the sexual union? Why or why not?

- [12.](#) Why do we ask you not to share your 'hope list' with your spouses unless they ask to see it?

- [13.](#) What are two things we can learn about hope from Abraham in Romans 4:18-21?

Other resources:

If you want a guided tour [Hope for Dismal: Making a Marriage This Procession](#), use this session by restoring

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Biblical Foundations for Freedom

By Paul J. Bucknell

Footnotes

[1] We must remember that hope is not deluded belief. Hope aligns itself with the promises, principles and purposes of God's Word. For example, should a wife who left her husband for another man be hopeful for her new marriage? Any hope for that new marriage has to be rooted

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in sincere repentance from being an adulteress. Unless conviction bears its fruit of repentance, then hope of a good marriage is a delusion that leads down the broad road leading to destruction.

[2] This principle is true whether it be for our marriage or any aspect of the Christian life.

[3] There are many word phrases that convey a spirit of giving up. It is important that you begin to detect what these phrases are so that you can quickly spot and reject them. Write these phrases down and then you will see how the evil one has been toying with your life and marriage. Then we can more easily seek God's responses.

[4] We have used the New American Standard Bible throughout this series unless otherwise noted.

[5] From this we should gain great hope that God is concerned and involved in the selection of a spouse.

[6] The Hebrew is more accurate and obvious because the words start out the same. The two English words for woman vary at the beginning rather than the end of the word so it is not so noticeable.

[7] We gather this from several places: (1) Their sense of nakedness upon sin's arrival; (2) Moses' light from his close communion with God; and (3) the expected growing glory as God's people closely commune with God. See further discussion on this thought in our [Meeting with God](#) and [Genesis 1:26-27 \(Outward Image\)](#)

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