

## What is God's primary purpose for marriage?

Written by Reb Bradley

Friday, 25 June 2010 12:57 - Last Updated Friday, 25 June 2010 13:08

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Excerpted from "Help for the Struggling Marriage" by Reb Bradley



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Understanding God's purpose for marriage is of the utmost importance, because to marry and miss it is to enter into a life full of frustration and disappointment -- setting the stage for great marital unrest. Most of us tend to marry with very romanticized ideas of what marriage is going to be. With great excitement we anticipate the relationship that will finally meet our romantic and emotional needs. God's primary intention for marriage however, is not what most of us imagine it to be. He has not designed marriage as a place where we can finally try to get our needs met. He has created it as something much better -- something far more grand than that. God intends to use marriage to accomplish a very important goal -- one that is His *primary* goal for all Christians. God's

*primary purpose for marriage is*

*to use it*

*to help*

***shape us into the image of His Son.***

If we miss out on this we are doomed to a life of anxiety and frustration.

Yes, marriage is God's arrangement for lifetime companionship and the arena for our sexual expression, but like with all that He has created, God uses marriage to direct us towards Himself. The challenges offered in marriage He capitalizes on to help shape and mold us into the image of Jesus. **To evaluate our personal success in a marriage we must not then look to see if our needs are being met, but we must ask ourselves, *"Am I demonstrating the image and character of Jesus Christ?"***

We determine our success by how much we are becoming like Christ -- loving and honoring our spouse according to the specific roles God has laid out for us in the Scriptures. Far wiser than us, God knows that as we grow into the

*image of Jesus*

our

**greatest**

needs are met.

Sadly, most of us have been under that false notion that God means for our mate to meet all of our romantic and emotional needs. We marry, fully intending to have our spouse be all that we ever wanted in a mate. Shortly after the wedding though, we begin to think that our new partner

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has a lot of changing to do. In fact, it appears they are **far** from being able to fully meet our needs. Instead of being fully committed to

**our**

idea of what a marriage is all about, they entered in with their

**own**

ideas of what marriage is to be -- along with their own list of needs they expect

**us**

to meet.

## The most successful marriages

A study of marriage in history reveals that long-lasting marriages are generally those which are more "role" oriented than "romance" oriented. That is, those Christian couples who marry with a clear understanding of their biblical roles, and have as their primary purpose to carry them out, are generally happier in marriage than those who marry in order to get their needs met. Considering that

20<sup>th</sup> century America places such emphasis on building marriages on the right romantic "

chemistry

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," it should be no surprise that many are easily disappointed in their marriages. What we have come to believe to be right romantic "chemistry" is actually nothing more than "self-centered" love. Most people are romantically drawn to those who *gratify* them, so marry with expectations of being fulfilled by their mate. That type of love is not true selfless love, but is self-centered, basing its attraction on personal gratification. It says,

*"I love you for what you do for me. I am drawn to you for how you make me feel. I know I am in love with you, because I need you so much."*

### *Needing*

someone is not evidence of a selfless, giving love for them -- contrarily, it is evidence that you want them for the emotional fulfillment you will receive from them. It is a reasonable estimate to suggest that 98% of all Christian marriages today are based on this dangerous form of self-serving love. Is it a surprise that so many are unhappy in marriage?

Men and women are different in their unique expressions of self-centered love for each other. A woman frequently marries looking for fulfillment in her *relationship* with her husband. Her husband, on the other hand, marries looking for fulfillment *outside*

the marriage in his job or in a hobby. In a normal marriage we find a wife trying to get her needs met

*in her husband*

and a husband wanting his wife

*to be with him*

while he gets his needs met outside the home. Wives tend to want

*relationship*

. Husbands tend to want

*companionship*

. God, knowing this, puts these two together with the intent that overcoming their differences will help make them more like His Son. He wants neither one to try to get their "needs" met in the other. He put them in the relationship to learn to be

*givers*

not takers. God knows that

*that*

is our

**greatest**

inner need.

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One problem in understanding the truth of this is that the wife's needs do sound more noble than her husband's, since she puts so much emphasis on the *relationship*. Yet God has not called us to commit to a

***relationship***

(or even to get anything

*out*

of a relationship). He has called us to commit to a

***person***

. There is a big difference between loving a person and loving a relationship. A genuine loving commitment to a person requires

*selflessness*

-- your goal being to give and get nothing back (1 Cor 13:5). Loving a

*relationship*

, on the other hand, feeds

*selfishness*

, because it is committing yourself to something you will benefit from. It is an investment in yourself. Impatience, anger, and frustration will flourish in a relationship where the relationship itself is valued more than the other person it involves. Giving to

*get*

is never consistently satisfying.

If we are ever to find joy in our marriage we must never lose sight of God's goal for us -- complete *selflessness*. For only in that kind of submission to God is there joy. Only when we are truly submitting to God and honoring our mate the way He has commanded will we find fulfillment. As the designer of the marriage relationship He knows that our obedience will fulfill far deeper needs in us than any we thought we had. For with that obedience not only do we have the peace that comes from knowing we are right with God, but our spouse thrives on the character of Jesus reflected in our actions and they become a better partner -- making the marriage a more pleasant place to be.

We can learn something about this from the account of Adam and Eve. They were two individuals who thought they knew what their needs were and what it would take to make them

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happy. Their desires though, when achieved, brought little more than a sweet taste in their mouths. They settled for less, and in doing so, alienated themselves from God and brought a great deal of pain to following generations. What a price to pay for such fleeting happiness! Had they abided by God's perfect plans they would have been able to enjoy *real* fulfillment.

Like Adam and Eve many of us think that it is possible to achieve happiness by doing that which is appealing to the flesh. We are tempted to believe that if only we can get our spouse to pay the right kind of attention to us or to stop "hassling" us we will be happy. Because that is not **God's** way though, we can be sure that no matter what we obtain we will never be satisfied. It will be a never-ending, highly stressful search.

### Marital difficulties make us more like Jesus.

Those who welcome the difficulties of marriage, become more like Jesus. Those who bail out of marriage, or quietly wish theirs would end, miss the spiritual benefits of enduring trials. Learning to endure trials makes one more holy. Jesus himself was made perfect (*mature or complete*) through his suffering. Consider:

*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* ☐ Hebrews 2:10

☐

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*Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered* □ □ Hebrews 5:8

Through trials believers are shaped into the image of Christ.

*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces  
perseverance* ;

*perseverance,*

*character*

*; and character,*

*hope*

*. □ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the  
Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Romans 5:3-5

□

*This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will  
call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The  
LORD is our God.'*" Zech 13:9

□

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all  
kinds of trials. □ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes  
even though refined by fire -- may be*

*proved genuine*

*and*

*may*

*result in praise, glory and honor*

*when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Peter 1:6-7

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*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James 1:2-4

*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.* 1 Pet 4:1

*" Endure hardship as discipline; . . . God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness, . . . it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Hebrews 12:7,10,11

God's primary goal for His people is for them to be conformed into the image of Christ. He therefore uses difficulties and challenges to refine our character and strengthen our faith. Without discipline and challenge an athlete never grows stronger or more skilled. Without testing through suffering, a Christian will never grow strong in Christ. Growth, both natural and spiritual, comes only through challenge.

Following Christ means the laying aside of our plans and goals and the adoption of God's. Therefore, if we share God's goal, and wish to become like Christ, then we will can *rejoice* when we encounter the opportunities for growth afforded by suffering. Having a joyful response



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however, requires that we actually do

share Christ's goals for our life. If we are pursuing a trouble-free, happy marriage we will avoid and resist opportunities for suffering, but if we share God's values and crave *godliness*, we will genuinely find joy in our difficulties.

Many want to avoid the challenge of marriage, because they mistakenly believe that God's ultimate goal for them is "happiness." They perhaps, made a decision to follow Christ originally because someone told them that if they added Christ to their life he would make things "go better." They came to Christ for "happiness." They married to be "happy." They were defrauded. God desires for his people **joy**, not happiness.

□□□□ *Joy* comes from trust in God's love and sovereignty -- it is an *inner peace* not connected to circumstance (Phil 4:4-9).

*Happiness*

is nothing more than feelings of well-being based on *happenstance*

-- it is conditioned completely on what

*happens*

or

*how things go*

. Like Christ, who was called the "Man of Sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3), those Christians in God's will, find themselves in many unpleasant and unhappy hardships, even in a challenging or difficult marriage. They will however, have great joy if they trust God is in control of the trial, that He is using it to strengthen their faith, and that He will not give them more than they can handle.

Those Christians who forsake their wedding vows and abandon their mates, often justify their action by declaring that God wants them to be happy, and separation is the only thing which will bring them happiness. The error of this type of thinking should be obvious. God wants for us not *happiness*, but the *joy which results from godliness*. We grow in godliness by selflessly loving others in the midst of adversity. Leaving an unhappy marriage only shows we didn't allow the trial to drive us to Christ.

Thinking we understand God's plan, some of us also sell ourselves short. We may grasp the

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need to stick with our marriage, so we do just that. We hang in there. We may even feel we are doing well to handle our mate's disagreeableness, but the truth is that God has not called us to simply "*hang in there*" or *tolerate* our husband or wife. The command is not, "*Husbands tolerate your wife as Christ tolerates the Church*

." God's goal is not for us to

*put up with*

our mate, but for us to be uncompromisingly

*devoted*

to them, seeking to get back nothing in return. There is a world of difference between toleration and commitment -- the one is self-

*protective*

and the other is self-

*sacrificing*

. One makes us a self-concerned, cautious

*observer*

and the other a devoted

*participant*

.

## What about those for whom it does not *work*?

There are those who believe that they have tried it God's way and yet feel it did not work. That would, of course, be impossible. If something God designed hasn't worked for us, the problem lies in **our approach** not with God's design. God is perfect and nothing He does or creates is flawed. In fact, his plans for marriage are not simply OK -- they are wonderful and incredibly brilliant! As we whole-heartedly submit ourselves to God and comply with His master-plan

**we can be sure**

our lives will be blessed. If we rest in His perfection and wisdom we can know that obedience to Him will bear good fruit. If we have not found fulfillment in "trying" it God's way, we need to realize that we weren't doing it

*right*

. It could very well be that we were hindered in succeeding, because we were doing something to give the devil a foothold in our life.

**We**

most probably have been the source of our own failure.

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The fact is, we must obey God not because we want to make our spouse change, or because the trial will go away, but because God has spoken. The very fact we make the statement, "*I tried that and it didn't work,*"

indicates that we didn't obey God with a pure heart -- our motives were *self*

-serving -- we were obeying in order to get a result. As followers of Jesus, we don't give obedience to God a "try," or follow biblical principles so that we will be blessed -- we obey Christ because He is the Lord.

May all who read these words be willing to trust God and do what is right. Amen!

### Addendum

Lest the reader think that God has no interest in romance, it is important to remember that God was the original inventor of romantic love, and in fact, devoted the entire book of Song of Solomon to the subject. (Many even construe that book to be a metaphor of Christ's love for the Church.) Let none be confused -- God does desire his people to enjoy romance in marriage. However, those who enter into marriage with the intention of finding perfect romantic fulfillment, have entered it with self-centered motives and will therefore find great disappointment. The best romantic love is fostered in a marriage in which both partners have served one another selflessly. Their love has grown, because they have been won by the other's devotion. May we all foster great romantic love in our marriages by our selfless service to our mates.

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[http://www.familyministries.com/marriage\\_purpose.htm](http://www.familyministries.com/marriage_purpose.htm)