

SIGNPOSTS

How Our Families Point to God's Family

We're continuing our Family Matters series, exploring why family matters to God and how our families can point us towards His family.

What do signs do? They show us where we are, where we need to go, and how to get there. They orient and direct us.

In the same way, our families, and particularly Christian marriages, are designed to be signposts, pointing beyond themselves to something greater: Christ and His Church.

As Timothy Keller writes in *The Meaning of Marriage*:

"You want to know the secret of a great marriage? Then you need to understand the mystery of Christ in the church. Ultimately, marriage is a signpost."

Paul makes this connection explicit in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:1-2 NLT

1 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. 2 Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

And then, speaking about marriage:

Ephesians 5:21-33 NLT

Spirit-Guided Relationships: Wives and Husbands

21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. 24 As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her 26 to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. 27 He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. 28 In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. 29 No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. 30 And we are members of his body.

31 As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” 32 This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. 33 So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

So why does marriage matter to all of us, regardless of our relationship status?

1. Marriage Is God’s Purposeful Design

Marriage is God's idea. Its story begins in Genesis:

Genesis 2:24 NLT

“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.”

Throughout the Old Testament, marriage becomes a picture of God's relationship with His people.

Isaiah describes God's delight:

Isaiah 62:5 (NLT)

“As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you.”

Jeremiah describes Israel's unfaithfulness:

Jeremiah 3:20 (NLT)

“But you have been unfaithful to me, you people of Israel! You have been like a faithless wife who leaves her husband.”

And Hosea points to God's faithful, redeeming love:

Hosea 2:19 (NLT)

“I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion.”

Then Jesus comes as the Bridegroom who loves and sacrifices Himself for His Bride, the Church.

Ephesians 5:31–32 (NLT)

“A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.”

The picture culminates in Revelation:

Revelation 19:7 (NLT)

“For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb [Jesus], and his bride has prepared herself.”

From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture tells the story of God pursuing, loving and remaining faithful to His people.

Marriage is God's purposeful design, but it is also a signpost pointing beyond earthly marriage to our union with Christ.

No Condemnation

We also need to recognise that we live in a broken world. We experience relational pain, abuse, death and loneliness.

Some are happily married, some unhappily married, some widowed, some single by choice and others longing to be married.

Wherever we find ourselves, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Condemnation is not from Jesus. There is hope in Jesus.

Paul also speaks about singleness in 1 Corinthians 7. Both marriage and singleness are legitimate callings, with different blessings and burdens.

If you are single and desire marriage, that is a good desire. But don't make marriage an idol. Marriage cannot complete you. Only Jesus can complete you.

Whether we marry or remain single, we all need to understand the "great mystery" of marriage. Earthly marriage points to something greater. It is a signpost pointing us towards Christ.

2. Marriage Is Covenant, Not Contract

The Bible doesn't describe relationships in terms of contracts. It speaks of **covenants**, binding relationships established by promises of commitment and faithfulness.

God made covenants with Noah, Abraham and Israel, and ultimately established a New Covenant with us through Jesus' sacrifice.

Biblical marriage reflects this covenant:

“I give myself to you. I belong to you, and I promise to remain faithful to you.”

At our wedding, John and I exchanged rings and said:

“I give you this ring as a symbol [a sign] of my love and covenant”.

We promised:

“For better, for worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, until death do us part.”

That's covenant.

Love is not simply a feeling. It is a choice. It is commitment.

God also designed intimacy to belong within the safety and security of covenant. In the same way that we don't want God's love without His covenant commitment to us, marriage brings love, belonging, intimacy and faithfulness together.

This is what Paul is getting at when he says:

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

Christian marriage is a relationship of mutual submission. It is not domination, control or tolerating abuse. Abuse is a distortion of God's design and is never acceptable.

The model is Christ: love that gives itself, sacrifices itself and seeks the good of the other.

Biblical marriage is not about one person grasping for power over another, but two people laying down power for one another:

I entrust myself to you, and you entrust yourself to me. We belong to one another, we serve one another, and together we become one.

And ultimately, this points us to Christ.

3. Marriage Is Christ on Display

A sign is not the destination. Its purpose is to point you towards something.

Marriage is not ultimately about marriage. It points beyond itself to Christ and His Church.

Timothy Keller writes:

“Marriage is God's gift to the church. Through Christian marriages, the story of the gospel—of sin, grace, and restoration—can be seen and heard both inside the church and out in the world. Christian marriages proclaim the gospel.”

That means your marriage is not just about you.

Your marriage proclaims the gospel.

Are our marriages pointing people in the right direction? Are they displaying Christ to our children and to the world? Are they proclaiming the gospel, or causing confusion?

Marriage requires constant dying to self, forgiveness, reconciliation, faithfulness and endurance.

Every time we forgive our spouse and are reconciled, we put Christ on display.

Paul describes this kind of love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT

4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

In the same way, for all of us as part of the family of God, Jesus calls us to display his love to the world.

John 13:34-35 NLT

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

Our love is on display to the world. It's the signpost that points people to Jesus.

4. Marriage Points to Our Ultimate Union with Christ

This is why marriage matters to everyone, regardless of our age, stage of life or relationship status.

The ultimate picture is not earthly marriage. It is Christ and His Bride, the Church. The Bible describes everyone who belongs to Jesus as part of this Bride. Yes, that means all of us!

Revelation gives us a picture of where history is heading:

Revelation 19:6-8 NLT

6 Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder (in other words it's a giant, loud party):

“Praise the Lord!

For the Lord our God,[b] the Almighty, reigns.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice,
and let us give honor to him.

For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,

and his bride has prepared herself.
8 She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.”
For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people.

“[The Bride] consists of the whole redeemed Church and is destined to be an eternal companion to the Lamb.”

— John Lennox, *God, AI and the End of History*

Christianity isn’t simply about being saved from judgement or “getting into heaven”. We’re being saved for someone and brought into the family of God.

And just as a bride prepares for her wedding, the Church is being prepared for Christ. Ephesians 5 says Christ is making His Bride “holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word”, so that He might “present her to himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.”

Revelation 19 then gives us a picture of that Bride, dressed in fine linen representing “the good deeds of God’s holy people”.

We are saved by grace, but Christ is transforming us. We are transformed by reading God’s Word and applying it to our lives - through obedience, love, forgiveness, generosity and faithfulness.

From Genesis onwards, earthly marriage points towards something far greater: Jesus and His Church. Marriage is God’s purposeful design, a covenant relationship, Christ on display, and a signpost pointing to our ultimate union with Christ.

This is good news!

Connect Group Questions

1. **Marriage is a covenant, not a contract.** What does it mean to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21)? How can we practise this kind of self-giving, Christ-like love in our marriages, friendships, families and church community?
2. **Our relationships are signposts pointing people towards Jesus.** What are some practical ways we can display Christ through the way we love, serve, forgive and relate to others?
3. **We are the Bride of Christ, and the Church is being prepared for His return.** How is God’s Word transforming you, and what is one area where you could grow in obedience, faithfulness or love as you prepare for Christ’s return?