



# What's the Point of Marriage?

**God's plan is greater than your wants and needs.**

You can use this Bible Study on your own or as part of a group. Go to <http://todayschristianwomanstore.com/biblestudies.html> to download **free** resources on how to lead a life-changing Bible study and tips for getting the most out of participating in small group experience.

**Scripture Focus:** Genesis 2:18–25; Acts 2:42–47; Romans 12; Colossians 3:1–19

**Article:** “The Purpose-Driven Marriage” by Rick Warren, MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP

**M**ost of us, as young women, dreamed about what marriage would be like. We hoped for romance, intimate friendship, and fairy-tale like bliss. But is marriage really about our own personal fulfillment? How is God calling us as mature Christian women to think differently about marriage and its purpose in our lives and in this world? Rick Warren, in his article “The Purpose-Driven Marriage,” invites us to embrace this truth: A marriage centered on Christ should be focused on glorifying God. Our main purpose in marriage should be much greater than fulfilling our own wants and needs or even the wants and needs of our spouse. Instead it should be focused on being of the same mind, according to Jesus, so that with one accord and one voice we glorify God.

This Today's Christian Woman Bible Study will help you deepen your faith as you dig into Scripture, reflect on the truth of God's Word, and take action to live out your faith by deepening your sense of purpose in your marriage. You can use this Today's Christian Woman Bible Study on your own as part of your personal spiritual growth, or you can use it in a group setting as you discuss God's Word with a community of friends and grow in faith together.

## Connect

Option: If you'd like, begin your study with this interactive experience.

Set out a bunch of women's magazines and entertainment magazines (and invite participants to bring some of their own to your meeting). Have women form pairs to flip through magazines looking for cultural messages about love, romance, sex, and marriage. Some may be blatant messages (such as an article about marriage) while some may be more subtle (such as the types of pictures depicting couples in love). Prompt pairs to talk through questions like: How does our culture view marriage? What does our culture tell us is the purpose of marriage? What does our culture think brings about marital fulfillment? What is the difference between a marriage based on romance and a marriage based on commitment?

work within us." Glorifying God, not personal fulfillment, then becomes the main purpose in marriage.

>> What stands out to you most from the article "The Purpose-Driven Marriage"? Why?

## Get Ready

**Before the study, read the article "The Purpose-Driven Marriage" (included at the end of this study). Or, if you'd prefer, begin your meeting by reading the article aloud as a group.**



## Open Up

Our culture portrays the main purpose of marriage as contributing to our personal happiness. If a person is not happy in marriage, then marriage is no longer fulfilling its purpose and divorce becomes an option. But Gary Thomas, in his book *Sacred Marriage*, says that the purpose of marriage is beyond happiness, sexual expression, the bearing of children, companionship, mutual care and provision, or anything else. Thomas believes the purpose of marriage is more about making us holy than making us happy. When we focus on pleasing God in marriage, instead of pleasing ourselves, marriage becomes an institution that aids in the process of sanctification, making us more like Christ. Rick Warren says in this type of marriage, "We remain committed to each other because we remain committed to Christ and his

- >> Before reading Warren's article, how might you have described the purpose of marriage in your own words?
- >> Which of Warren's five biblical purposes for marriage do you resonate with most? How do his thoughts on the purpose of marriage compare or contrast with your own?

## Seek

Before launching into your time of Scripture exploration, pause as a group to pray. Express your desire to seek out God's truth in his Word and to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit during your discussion.

## Discover

**Marriage teaches us to have authentic and intimate fellowship and a strong sense of community with all believers.**

Rick Warren says marriage should be a place where we open up to each other and share our hurts, reveal our feelings, confess our failures, disclose our doubts, admit our fears, acknowledge our weaknesses, and ask each other for help and prayer.

When you learn to have this depth of fellowship with your spouse, your marriage becomes a foundation to teach you how to love others. Marriage can be a support to develop the type of community described in the Book of Acts. Our home becomes a place of hospitality and warmth that invites fellowship beyond the superficial level. The joy, love, and depth of relationship shared in marriage spills out to the community of believers allowing for fellowship that is glad, sincere, and full of praise to God.

Read **Genesis 2:18–25** and **Acts 2:42–47**.

- >> These passages describe our profound need for relationship and illustrate what authentic fellowship can look like. In your own words, what is authentic fellowship? And what factors, habits, choices, or attitudes can prevent us from having this depth of fellowship in our marriage?
- >> What choices or habits can best foster true fellowship in a marriage? What role do trust, time, and prayer have in a relationship that admits doubts, fears, and weaknesses?

- >> How can marriage teach us to love others with Christ's love? How can we use what we learn in marriage to aid in the fellowship of believers?

## God uses the marriage relationship to make us more like Christ.

Read **Colossians 3:1–19**.

These virtues of the new nature are essential in a Christian marriage. When you focus on loving your spouse with the love of Christ, these virtues will be practiced daily, chiseling you more and more into Christ's image and binding you together in unity. When you let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and homes, your marriage will be a relationship where you admonish each other in the wisdom and words of Christ with sincere hearts and reverence for God. Worship will become an integral part of your marriage relationship as you focus on glorifying God together. When you work at your marriage relationship with all of your heart, serving your spouse as you would serve Christ, your marriage relationship will be used as a tool to shape you into Christ's image, and you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

- >> How do the characteristics of the old nature (Colossians 3:5–9) affect the marriage relationship? What are some ways they creep into your own behavior patterns or attitudes in your marriage?
- >> Which of the virtues of the new nature described in this passage are most difficult for you to live out in your marriage? Why?
- >> How does God use marriage to chisel away our old nature? Share how the Lord is using your marriage to change you more into the image of Christ.

## God uses the marriage relationship to train us to honor and serve others above ourselves.

Read **Romans 12**.

Honoring your husband's needs before your own and having a desire to serve him out of love and devotion is essential to a healthy marriage. This same attitude of service learned in marriage can be used by God to train us to serve others. God uses experiences, including pain and suffering in our lives and

in our marriages, to help others. Rick Warren says, “God doesn’t just use our strengths; he uses our weaknesses, and even our failures.” God can use what we learn in marriage, including the difficult times, to teach us to serve humbly, sacrificially, and effectively.

God planned in advance the work he has for each of us to do. In marriage we can work together for God’s glory. We can blend the talents, abilities, and personality traits that he has given to each of us to serve others and to further his kingdom. Our marriage can then be a union that has a purpose to serve others. Our home can be a place of true hospitality where we serve and share with those in need. Out of this sense of purpose we will use our time, resources, and energy to serve others for God’s glory.

- >> **Romans 12:1 says offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, is a spiritual act of worship. How can serving your husband be an act of worship to God? Re-imagine your everyday life through this lens and share some practical examples.**
- >> **Based on Romans 12:9–21, how should we love and serve the people around us (including our husband)? What challenge from this passage jumps out at you?**
- >> **How could you live out the call of Romans 12 as a couple? What are some practical ways you and your husband can minister to others together?**

### Optional Activity

We often think of ministry as something positive—something that comes out of our strengths, talents, and passions. But sometimes God calls us to minister in a surprising way: through our weaknesses and struggles. Break into pairs and share with your partner one way God has used something *difficult* in your marriage to help others.

## Change

Despite what the culture tells us, marriage is about more than our own personal happiness. Marriage allows us the opportunity to glorify God with one heart and voice. Together we learn to have authentic and intimate fellowship, share in ministry to other believers, and spread the gospel of Christ. In the process, we become more like Christ. It’s not always easy, but God can use even the struggles of marriage to shape our character and strengthen our faith.

- >> **Your marriage has a purpose: serving and glorifying God. How should knowing your purpose in marriage affect your daily activities?**

How should it affect the way you treat your husband?

- >> How should knowing your purpose in marriage help you with the ministries and mission God has given you as a couple?
- >> In light of all you've read and discussed, what's one attitude, action, or pattern in your life that you sense God is leading you to change?

## Take Action

**Choose one of the following steps you'll do after the study to apply God's Word to your life.**

- ▶ Select one of the passages you read during this study and commit it to memory. Make a daily habit of meditating on that passage from Scripture, inviting God to impress his truth upon your heart.
- ▶ Spend intentional time praying for your husband every day for a week. Pray for his faith, his character, and any needs he may have. Also pray for your marriage: for a sense of purpose, for your ministry together, and for opportunities God may give you to serve him as a couple.
- ▶ Discuss with your husband practical ways you can serve your family, neighborhood, community, and world together; and then do it!

## Commit

Select one specific verse or principle from Scripture (highlighted in this study) that you sense God really challenging you to more purposefully apply to your marriage. Then pray aloud with your group, taking turns praying about each passage or principle and asking God to help each participant live out his Word in each of your marriages.



## Explore More

**Want to dig deeper into this topic? Check out these articles and online resources.**

- >> **Deepen Your Love** from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com)
- >> **Faith as the Marriage Glue** from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)
- >> **God's Workshop** from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

>> **Serving Alongside Your Spouse** from **GiftedForLeadership.com**

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## The Purpose-Driven Marriage

*Use these five biblical purposes to give direction to your marriage.*

By Rick Warren

I suppose you'd expect a man who's been married 30 years to a beautiful, intelligent woman to be able to share with you the intimate secrets to having a perfect marriage.

But I'm going to disappoint you! That's because my wife and I don't have a perfect marriage. Kay is without a doubt my best friend, and we have a wonderful relationship—but as far as a perfect marriage, well, there's no such thing.

“As the Scriptures say, ‘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” (Ephesians 5:31–32).

What Kay and I do have is a marriage centered on Christ, specifically focused on glorifying God. We remain committed to each other because we remain committed to Christ and his work within us.

### No Easy Road

After three decades in ministry, I've noticed that it's not unusual for couples to float through their first year or two of marriage in a love-blinded bliss.

But, frankly, that didn't happen for Kay and me. Our first two years together were the most difficult. In fact, we were ready to throw in the towel. If we both hadn't been committed to Jesus Christ and we both hadn't agreed that divorce was not an option, we wouldn't have stayed together. It was simply too difficult.

Kay even said that in those first few years of marriage, she often wished that one of two things would happen: either she'd be widowed, or God would change his mind and say divorce was now okay!

Since then, we've met many couples who were convinced their marital struggles meant there was no hope for healing. We can say from experience that's not true; there's always hope!

Part of the difficulty for Kay and me is that we were virtual strangers when we got married, but we began finding out things about each other immediately—like the fact that apart from our love for God, we were about as opposite in nature as two people could be.

We viewed life from two different angles and argued over just about everything. I remember Kay's father sat us down the night before we were married and said, "There are five areas where marriages usually have conflict: money, sex, in-laws, children, and communication."

He proved to be prophetic: Kay and I went five for five! We fought over every single one of those items.

Not only did we disagree over those things, we couldn't even agree about how to disagree! Kay is an intense person who needs to talk. My preferred method of dealing with problems was just to walk away. That was a volatile combination!

The single factor that kept us married in those early years was that we agreed on one thing: divorce would never be an option for us. You can't leave the door open even a little bit, or eventually one of you will try to escape.

Because we knew we were in it for the long haul, we were forced to accept each other's differences. What else were we going to do?

Slowly, over time, God helped us not only to accept our differences, but to appreciate them. Through the process we learned that any successful marriage is built upon the biblical truth that God designed each of us with five purposes in mind: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions.

In other words, until you realize you were placed here for God's purposes, then your life—and your marriage—will be difficult, complicated, and exhausting. But once you understand God's plan, your life—and your marriage—take on new meaning. And once you and your spouse both get this—when both of you are living purpose-driven lives—then guess what happens? Your marriage becomes a purpose-driven marriage!

### **Balancing Biblical Purposes**

Here are the five biblical purposes you should keep balanced in your marriage:

**1. You and your spouse were both planned for God's pleasure.** How would your marriage immediately change if you understood deeply that your

spouse was created for God's pleasure? Or if your spouse understood deeply that you were planned for God's pleasure?

A man once asked Jesus, "What's the most important commandment?" Jesus replied, "I can summarize the entire Bible in two statements: Love God, and love other people!" (**Matthew 22:36-39**). That includes your spouse.

Life is about relationships, not achievements. First and foremost, it's about developing a relationship with God that will last forever—we call that worship. You also worship God when you love and sacrifice for your spouse (just read through **Romans 12** with a view of what its applications would mean to your marriage).

Any time you give pleasure to God, you're worshiping him, and the Bible teaches that loving your spouse—the mate God gave you for a lifetime—brings pleasure to him.

**2. You and your spouse were formed for God's family.** God made an incredible promise about the gathering of even just two believers: "For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20).

So if both you and your spouse are believers, God is already in your marriage working to transform the two of you into a purpose-driven family unit! Isn't that incredibly great news?

But Jesus wants us to love real people—not ideal people—and your marriage is a lab for learning how to love like Jesus loves.

It seems funny now, but one conflict between Kay and me in marriage was over the really trivial issue of soap! For me, a hot steamy shower is a spiritual experience—right up there with eating fresh cinnamon rolls. I also happen to be a person who gets bored quickly, so I like variety; I don't want to use the same kind of soap all the time.

One day I told Kay we needed some different kinds of soap. But I said it in a way that sounded as though our marriage was a failure because we used the same kind of soap all the time. Three or four months later at Christmas, to "get back at me," she wrapped and placed 27 different bars of soap under the tree!

My point is that within marriage, God has created an opportunity for us to develop a true intimacy and authenticity with another human being. God wants for you and your spouse to go beyond the superficial chit-chat that is, unfortunately, so common in many marriages.

To go this deep requires genuine, heart-to-heart, gut-level sharing, where you and your spouse get honest about who you are and what's happening in your lives. This happens when you both open up to each other and share your hurts, reveal your feelings, confess your failures, disclose your doubts, admit your fears, acknowledge your weaknesses, and ask each other for help and prayer.

**3. You and your spouse were both created to become like Christ.** As I mentioned, marriage is a laboratory for developing God's love in you. He'll use your spouse to build his values, attitudes, morals, and character within you.

Once you understand this, a lot of what happens within your marriage will begin to make more sense. When you start to ask, "Why is this happening to me?" the answer is—to make you more like Jesus!

In fact, the Bible teaches that God builds certain qualities within our lives by putting us in situations that make it difficult to show these qualities. In other words, for God to teach you real love, he'll put you around some unlovely people. For God to teach you real joy, he'll allow you to go through times of grief. To learn inner peace and patience, he'll allow storms of chaos and stressful situations in your life that test your patience and teach you to trust him.

In his book *Sacred Marriage*, our friend Gary Thomas makes the case that marriage was not meant to make you happy; it was meant to make you holy. That was an eye-opener for Kay and me. It made such sense. If God's purpose for each of our lives is to make us look more like Jesus, what better tool could he use than the marriage relationship?

Who better for God to use to chisel you than the person you live with seven days a week? When the difficult times come, you just have to realize you're being worked on! God is using each of you to shape the other person more and more into the image of Jesus.

**4. You and your spouse were both shaped for serving God.** The Bible says, "God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God has made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing" (Ephesians 2:10, NCV). We serve God by serving others, and we serve God by serving our spouse. God shapes us for service through a variety of methods, including our spiritual gifts, our passions, our abilities, our personality, and our experiences.

In fact, God will use the difficulties in your marriage to shape you into an effective minister to others. Who could better help the parents of a Down syndrome child than other parents with a Down syndrome child? Who could better help somebody recover from the pain of an addiction, a business failure, or a prodigal child than a couple who has been through these things and emerged with godly insights?

Could it be that the part of your marriage you regret or resent most—that which you've wanted to hide or forget—is the very thing God wants to use as your ministry to help and encourage others sharing the same struggle? God doesn't just use our strengths; he uses our weaknesses, and even our failures!

**5. You and your spouse were both made for a mission.** Your marriage not only involves ministry, it also involves mission. Your ministry is to believers and your mission is to non-believers—allowing God to use your marriage as a means for telling others about his love.

This may take many forms, from being a witness in your neighborhood to going overseas on mission trips together. The fact is, if you want God's blessing on your marriage, then you must care about what God cares about most. What is that? He wants his lost children found! He wants everyone to know him and his purposes for their lives.

If you want to see how much God cares about the people around you, just look at the Cross. With outstretched arms, Jesus says, "I love them this much!"

Marriage is a life-long process designed to teach you to see the needs of another person as more important than your own. It's a difficult transition because it's not natural. It's not natural for me to look at life from Kay's point of view, and it's not natural for her to look at life from my point of view.

To think this way requires an intentional shift that can be made only through the power of God in your life. As you and your spouse make that shift, your marriage will become more and more purpose-driven—focused on the needs of others and balancing the purposes of worship, fellowship, discipleship, service, and missions.

The reward is greater than anything you could ever imagine. I've often thought what would have happened—or not happened—had Kay and I thrown in the towel many years ago. There would be no Saddleback Church, no purpose-driven ministry, and no "Purpose-Driven Life"!

God's plan for you and your spouse—for your marriage—is wider and deeper than anything in your wildest, craziest dreams. May our heavenly Father help you to catch this vision as you chase it into the future.

—Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California, is best-selling author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Zondervan). This article was published by MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP (part of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN) in September 2008.

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