

**Group Study on Marriage**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

Christian marriage is a beautiful gift from God. It was a part of God’s original design for creation, and was the first human relationship God created: a relationship of companionship, complementarity, sexual unity, exclusivity and permanency.

In the story of creation, God recognised it was *“not good for the man to be alone”*, and so decided to *“make a helper suitable for him”* (Genesis 2:18). What we realise here is that God saw value in human relationship, and the need to create a companion for Adam and someone to share life with him.

Genesis then tells us: *‘So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man’* (Genesis 2).

It is significant that God created Eve out of Adam’s side. In other words, she was created as an equal partner in marriage, with whom Adam could walk side-by-side. God brought them together as a gift for one another, to love and serve one another, and work together for God’s purposes. He does the same for all those who enter into marriage.

We hear more about God’s intended design for marriage when we read on: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”* (Genesis2: 24) In other words, when a couple is joined in marriage, a new family unit is formed – one that is distinct from their own parents and siblings.

More than just creating a new union or family unit, however, marriage also creates a new *organism*. Something beautiful is going on here. By joining husband and wife as *‘one flesh’,* God is reminding husband and wife that they are not in competition. For, as St Paul writes, *‘no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes is’* (Ephesians 5:28-29).

There are other deeply profound realities about this one flesh union between man and woman. It is the place and context God gives man and woman to delight in their complementarity, and to enjoy sexual relations (1 Corinthians 7:2-3). Sex between man and woman is so unique that it is capable of bearing life itself. How beautiful that God gives children as a natural fruit of married love! Of course, not all married couples are able to conceive children. However, the joining together of husband and wife in the sexual act nevertheless remains a beautiful enactment of their unity and mutual gift of self.

The Scriptures also reveal God’s intention for marriage to be exclusive and permanent. Christ says: *“[w]hat God has joined together, let man not separate”* (Matthew 19:6). The exclusivity and permanency of marriage benefits any children that the couple is blessed with, providing them (at least where biological children are concerned) with knowledge of their biological identity, and a place in which they can grow and be nurtured by both sexes.

Marriage also has a deeper reality because it reflects the relationship between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Just as Christ laid down his life for the Church, Christian men are called to show a sacrificial love towards their wives and wives are called to respect their husbands. Thus, as Christians, husband and wife are called to serve one another in love and service.

*Discussion questions*

* The idea of sexual exclusivity (having one sexual partner) is almost laughed at nowadays. Our culture seems to assume that everyone has sex before marriage. It can be difficult to act in a way contrary to what society expects. Discuss.
* Do you believe marriage is important? Why or why not?
* Marriage is meant to be a permanent estate for the benefit of all of the family. What are some benefits that marriage gives to the husband and wife? To their children?
* Man and woman were created equally but differently. They have complementary roles. In what ways do you think husband and wife may complement each other to make a complete whole?
* What would happen to marriage if the definition were changed?
* Sex in an incredibly intimate act through which children are created. How can children be seen as an expression of love?

*Close with prayer*

*Optional further research/reading:*

* CTICR Statement on *Human Sexuality: Three Key Issues*; available at <http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/> under Volume 3 ‘Ethical and Social Issues’)
* Conference paper by Dr John Kleinig entitled ‘Why get married? Six models for marriage’: <http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/2414/4210/8671/Models_of_Marriage.pdf>
* Book: Gene Edward Veith Jr, and Mary J. Moerbe, ‘Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood’