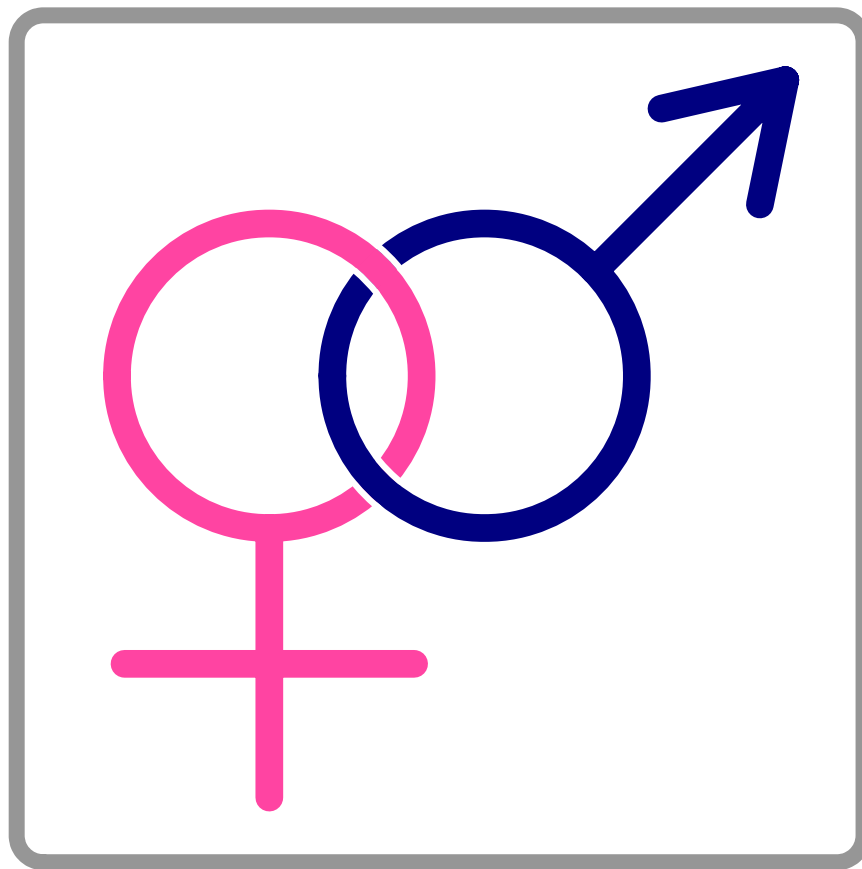


In Pursuit of a Healthy Marriage

Understanding Your God-given Roles



Unit 1



How God Designed Your Spouse

TRUTH

by memory – Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

in Bible –

Although the topic of this series is a healthy marriage, it is not just for married people. Be assured that this study will be relevant for you whether you are single, married, divorced, widowed or remarried. The issues that will be addressed are spiritual in nature and therefore, apply to all people regardless of their marital status. So whether you are married, want to be married (or don't), or wish you weren't married, your effort and attention during these next weeks won't be wasted.

In this series you will investigate the marital roles God has assigned to husbands and wives. Admittedly, the biblical teaching of marital roles is unpopular, to say the least. Even many Christians would admit that, to them, the traditional biblical view of roles in marriage seems dated, out of touch with the realities of life in modern society. But as always, your challenge is to be a hearer and doer of God's Word. So, you should only reject the teaching of marital roles contained in this material if you find it to be unbiblical, and not just because it seems distasteful to you in some way. On the other hand, if you find this teaching to be scripturally sound, then your life will be blessed if you embrace it as part of your spiritual journey with Christ.

As you study the **in Bible** Scriptures, remember that Jesus taught us to be hearers and doers of His words. It's very important that you think and pray about applying His word to your own life. Your application(s) should be specific and measurable. If you have trouble thinking of personal applications, try to complete this thought, "In response to the teaching in this passage, by God's grace I will..."

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What does it mean to be equal? Does it mean to be the same in all respects? Or, can things be said to be equal, even if they are the same in some ways and unique in others? This week's **in Bible** passages will show that God designed the first man and woman to be the same in some respects, but unique in others.

Genesis 1:26-28 – This passage shows us the basic equality of men and women.

Based on this passage, list 3 or 4 ways in which the first man and woman were created equal.

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Genesis 2:15-24 – Just a few verses after the previous passage, Scripture reveals that though the man and woman shared an inherent equality, they were also designed to be unique in some respects.

Based on this passage, how were the first man and woman created to be unique?

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Galatians 3:23-29 – This passage describes a way in which all redeemed men and women are alike.

According to this passage, how are all redeemed men and women alike?

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1 Peter 3:7 – This passage contains one similarity and one difference between men and women.

According to this passage, in what way are men and women the same? How are they different?

to summarize -

Perhaps it would be best to begin this series on marital roles with an acknowledgement that the scriptural teaching on this subject has often been abused. Some people within the church have distorted what the Bible says about the submission of a wife to her husband to argue that men are superior to women, or that women should be subjugated to men. Nothing could be further from the truth, but sadly, this false teaching has caused many to reject both the teaching itself and the Bible that supposedly supports it. So, before diving into this series let's make a few things very clear.

First, the Bible does not teach that men are in any way superior to women. Rather, it reveals that God designed men and women to be equals who share the same inherent value in His sight. And secondly, the Bible does not teach that women should be subjugated to men. In fact, it forbids the exploitation of any advantage – whether physical, economic, or social – to lord control over women. So what does the Bible teach about men and women? It does teach that *God established a pattern for the marriage relationship of a man and woman, each with a unique role to fill, which is intended to bring mutual benefit, harmony and fulfillment.* True, the Bible uses the "H" word (headship) and "S" word (submission) to describe these marital roles, but it does so for the benefit of each partner, and not to give ascendancy to men.

Next week you will explore what is meant by the terms headship and submission, but let's lay some groundwork this week by simply understanding how God made men and women to be both equal and unique. Imagine for a moment that you are watching the Olympic pairs ice skating competition. You're watching a particular couple glide down the ice preparing for their next throw-jump element. You see them pick up speed, they maneuver into position, and then...the female skater throws her partner twisting into the air. He sticks the landing and the audience erupts in thunderous applause. Is there anything wrong with this picture? Why shouldn't the woman toss the man? Why shouldn't the man get the applause for his perfect landing? Does it matter who throws who? Doesn't the woman have as much right to throw her partner as to be thrown? Doesn't the man have as much right to be thrown by his partner as to throw? And yet, this scenario feels as strange as it is unrealistic.

The purpose of this section of *The Journey* is to discover God's unique design of men and women and to embrace the unique roles that each has been designed to assume in marriage. In this first unit of four, the focus is on the question, "How did God create men and women"? There is no universal agreement in our culture about the nature of manhood and womanhood, or about the roles and functions of men and women in marriage. This lack of agreement can be traced to a rejection, or ignorance of, the biblical account of creation. For many, the creation story of Genesis is, at best, a myth that carries a few moral lessons. For these people, Genesis has nothing to say about the intrinsic nature of men or women. Even many who accept the Genesis account as historical fail to see how the

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facts of God's design of men and women apply to marital roles. The result is that many of us have an understanding of manhood and womanhood that may be more informed by culture, family history or popular philosophy, than by Scripture. This was not always the case. A century and more ago, the vast majority of Americans accepted the historic biblical definitions of manhood, womanhood and their respective marital roles, and interestingly enough, the divorce rate was only 1 in 40 marriages. Today, when it is argued that men and women are not uniquely designed and have no unique roles to fill in marriage, the divorce rate is 1 in 2. This modern ambiguity about marital roles may not be the sole cause of the failure of 50% of our marriages, but it is certainly a prime contributor. Therefore, understanding how God made men and women, and how He intended them to relate to one another in marriage is a crucial key to developing your own life-long, fulfilling marriage.

So, let us turn to Scripture. There we see a historical record that provides an overview of God's intelligent design of all things. Genesis tells us the very first things that can be said about cosmology, geology, botany, zoology, as well as human nature, because these were all designed with a purpose. It shows us that God purposely designed humanity with inherent rational capability, value, responsibility and glory, irrespective of gender. Biblical scholars call this their *ontological equality*, meaning that they are equal as beings before God. However, Genesis also reveals that God purposely designed the male and female to correspond to one another. In other words, they were designed with unique, complementary features that would define the roles they assumed in their relationship. So, while men and women share in their ontological equality before God, they are *functionally unique* before each other.

Let's focus first on how the man and woman were created equal. In Genesis 1:27 you read, "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*" From this you know that both men and women received the gift of being created in God's image. No other beings, not even angelic beings, have been given this privilege. His image may be thought of as the mark of His glory upon humanity that places us in special relationship with Him. That both male and female equally bear this image speaks to their equality in value to God, in their ability to relate to God and in their responsibility before God. In addition, verses 26 and 28 show that the man and woman were designed to share equally in their dominion over the earthly creatures, and in their responsibility to do so by filling the earth with their descendants. In the New Testament their ontological equality before God is proven by the fact that neither men nor women have any advantage over the other with respect to redemption. Rather they both benefit equally as fellow "...*heirs...of the grace of life...*" (1 Peter 3:7). Paul uses the phrase, "...*there is no male and female*" in Galatians 3:28 to impress upon his readers that in respect to being a recipient of grace, gender – like ethnicity and social status – is a non-issue.

But all this does not mean that God created male and female to be the same in all respects. In actual fact, male and female differences can be observed in spheres ranging from our physical capabilities to our emotional make-up and social behaviors. Are these differences merely cultural? Or, were men and women created to complement each other, to fit together?

The passage you read in Genesis 2 makes it clear that the woman was created to correspond to the man. She was designed to be something that another man could not be for him (too alike) and that the animals could not be for him (too different). Verse 18 reads, *"Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."* The phrase, *"...helper fit for him"* shows that the woman was intended to be a suitable match for the man, a corresponding partner, not an exact copy of him, nor a radical departure from him. To demonstrate this, God did not create the woman in the same way He had created the man. She was taken out of the man rather than from the ground (2:21-22), not to show that she was the less valuable of the two, but to demonstrate that she was designed to correspond to him. When Adam awoke he was thrilled to see just how she corresponded to him. He gave her a name that recognized both her equality and her uniqueness saying, *"This at last is 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 creation order of man, then woman, illustrates the roles that God had given them in relating to one another. By naming the woman in those first moments together, the man was assuming his God-given role of leader in the relationship. With joy he recognized that God had designed the woman to correspond to him as his unique helper. He recognized her as his equal, a partner whom he could lead in pursuing God's commission to rule over the earth. He saw that she was uniquely designed so that they would experience perfect harmony with one another. God designed men and women this way to bring glory to Himself and mutual blessing to you and your spouse. A man's leadership is intended bring blessing to his wife; her help and support is intended to return blessing to her husband. It is in the harmony of leader and helper that husbands and wives find the greatest and healthiest fulfillment in marriage. Assigning specific marital roles is not about deciding who is superior or inferior. It is about two equally valuable people embracing their unique design and relating to their spouse as s/he was designed.

Next week you will build on these general principles as you further explore the specific roles God has assigned to men and women in marriage.

online –

Remember to visit www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum for this week's downloadable audio, video, or print resources.

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EQUIPPING

What intellectual or emotional objections might you have to the teaching that God designed the woman to correspond to the man, and that to be male is to lead, to be female is to help and support? Do you disagree that this is the teaching of Scripture, or do you disagree for other reasons?

If married, is your marriage modeled after the pattern of male leadership and female support? If yes, give examples. If no, explain why not. If you are single, explain why you would or wouldn't want your marriage to be based on this pattern.

From your point of view and regardless of your gender or marital status, make a list of potential advantages or disadvantages of modeling a marriage relationship after this pattern.

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MISSION – STORY TELLING

During this year in *The Journey* you have learned a lot about what it means to live a missional life. You've learned that your mission is to share in Jesus' mission to make the gospel known by word and deed to all people across the street, track and ocean. And after investigating missional living, you began developing the habit of praying missionally and had an opportunity to serve missionally. Now, you will learn how to tell someone the story of your own spiritual journey. If the thought of this makes you a little nervous, just consider the advice of the Apostle Peter, who had once fearfully denied Christ himself, "...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

One way to give the reason for your hope in Jesus is to share your own personal experience of how you came to trust Him. During this series you will learn to share that experience by writing a 60-second testimony. This exercise will help equip you to tell a brief, attractive story about how and why you became a follower of Jesus. Keep in mind, this exercise is about your own personal journey to faith and not a theological defense of the Gospel. You have several weeks to craft your 60-second testimony, so get started now but don't rush the process. You may find the process to be a rich, spiritual experience in itself. Follow the steps in the process below:

1. **Review the example** on the next page of what makes a testimony clear and effective.
2. **Think and scribble** on the blank page so you can begin to get your thoughts on paper. You can write, scribble, or draw as you focus on what Jesus has done for you and what knowing Him means to you. Some questions are listed as food for thought. Don't worry about organizing all your thoughts just yet, just try to get them all on paper and use additional blank pages if necessary.
3. **Review the tips** page to help you organize your thoughts and write your testimony in a clear and attractive way.
4. **Draft and write** your testimony on the pages provided. Keep it short! Focus on the main points so you will be able to tell your story in about a minute. If you can do this, you will have no problem sharing more details in conversation when you have the opportunity.
5. **Practice telling it naturally** so that it doesn't sound like a formal presentation. If your testimony sounds weird to your ears, practice telling it until you can say it in a casual, conversational style.
6. **Share it with your Journey Group** to receive feedback and coaching that will help you tell your story more effectively.

EXAMPLE

“I was born and raised in a family that assumed they were Christians. So, as I grew up I assumed that I was a Christian as well, though later I came to think differently. I met a group of students who were living a life that was different than mine. I went to church like they did, but they didn’t talk about church and religion as much as they talked about a relationship with God that could be found through the person of Jesus Christ. I began to investigate by attending church and other activities with them to learn more about what they were talking about. There I began to understand what is called the Gospel, the good news that Christ did for us what we can’t do for ourselves. He died to pay the penalty that needed to be paid for my own sins, so that by receiving Him, I could have new life and a new relationship with God. I came to the place where my heart was surrendered to Him and I began to follow Him. Right away I noticed changes in my life, like peace that I hadn’t known before and a new hope about life. I knew I was a different person and gained an assurance that if I died I would be okay with God. My life began growing and changing from that point on.”

EXPLANATION

This person begins his testimony by talking about his life before becoming a Christian.	I was born and raised in a family that assumed they were Christians. So, as I grew up I assumed that I was a Christian as well, though later I came to think differently.
Next, he tells how he became a Christian. Note that he included a simple explanation of the Gospel, which is highlighted here.	I met a group of students who were living a life that was different than mine. I went to church like they did, but they didn’t talk about church and religion as much as they talked about a relationship with God that could be found through the person of Jesus Christ. I began to investigate by attending church and other activities with them to learn more about what they were talking about. There I began to understand what is called the Gospel, the good news that Christ did for us what we can’t do for ourselves. He died to pay the penalty that needed to be paid for my own sins, so that by receiving Him, I could have new life and a new relationship with God. I came to the place where my heart was surrendered to Him and I began to follow Him.
Lastly, he describes how his life has changed since becoming a Christian.	Right away I noticed changes in my life, like peace that I hadn’t known before and a new hope about life. I knew I was a different person and gained an assurance that if I died I would be okay with God. My life began growing and changing from that point on.

TIPS

- Organize your testimony around this simple outline to make it easy to follow. You may choose to modify the outline if you want to emphasize or de-emphasize a certain point.
 1. Before I became a Christian
 2. How I became a Christian
 3. Since I became a Christian
- Write your testimony in the way you naturally speak. You aren't presenting a report or preaching a sermon.
- If you choose to quote Scripture, only use a verse or two that relates to the central point of your story and wouldn't require explanation for it to be understood. You may want to paraphrase the verse by using common phrases rather than quoting.
- Avoid Christian jargon (e.g. saved, lost, born again, converted, etc.). These words don't always communicate what you intend.
- Remember that most people you meet will say they believe in God, so you will want to talk about trusting or following Jesus, rather than having a general faith in God.
- Emphasize why you believe Jesus is real and relevant in your life.
- Avoid talking about any church, denomination or Christian group in a derogatory way.
- Avoid giving the false impression that the Christian life is trouble free.
- Practice telling your story out loud. If you can't say it in the way you naturally speak in about a minute, it's too long.
- Ask yourself if your testimony would connect with someone on a personal level so that they could identify with your story.

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