

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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What is the purpose and the ultimate goal of marriage?

When you first got married what were you expecting from your relationship? Did you marry to find security with someone who would care for you, or maybe to escape from your parents' home? Every couple that marries has various reasons and motives for becoming husband and wife. However, do you know what God has declared in Scripture regarding His purpose for creating marriage? Do you understand how to realize the goal He intends for your relationship?

This article will help you understand God's purpose for marriage and give you some practical steps to achieving His desire for your marital union.

The goal

In the beginning, after God created all the things upon the earth, including Adam, He said, *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him"* (Gen. 2:18). God then created the woman and presented her to Adam. Then Scripture declares this timeless principle: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (Gen. 2:24). Within this passage God clearly reveals His intention that a man and his wife are to become one flesh. Therefore, oneness is God's ultimate purpose and goal for every marriage.

Most couples have heard these expressions *one flesh* or *oneness* before. However, many couples question what these terms mean and secretly wonder if such a oneness is even possible. Even those who believe that becoming one flesh is the goal of a godly marriage, still wonder how such a oneness can become a reality in their relationship. What does Scripture teach concerning how to achieve oneness with your spouse?

How does oneness occur?

The key to the mystery of becoming one flesh is really wrapped up in another word that is used to describe marriage: *companionship*. Becoming your mate's companion is the way God intended for you to become one-flesh with your spouse. The prophet Malachi used this word companion when he reproved the people of God for their harshness toward their wives. He declared, *"The Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously: Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant"* (Mal. 2:14).

Solomon also described the marital union in this manner when he warned his son concerning immoral women who might tempt him. The king urged his son to heed God's wisdom so that he might be delivered from *"the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God"* (Prov. 2:16-17). Once again the marital union is depicted as a covenant of companionship.

There are two different Hebrew words used in these passages for the word *companion*. Both words suggest an intimate friendship that occurs as two people are knit together in love. I like how the Bible uses the image of knitting to describe this bond of oneness. Knitting is something we can all relate to because we have all seen someone knit a sweater or afghan. Think about this illustration for a moment. When doing Fair-Isle knitting it requires an individual to make a purposeful choice to interweave multiple pieces of yarn together to obtain a single finished product. If you took two different colors of yarn and knit them together into a beautiful design it would powerfully illustrate the truth God is seeking to communicate. Each time you make a choice that results in stronger companionship with your spouse you intertwine yourself together with your mate. Likewise, each time you refuse compa-

nionship with your spouse you pull out a stitch and weaken the overall union of your two lives. I have seen the fruit of purposeful knitting in many marriages. These couples have worked hard at seeking every way possible to knit themselves together, and the result is a deep and intimate friendship between them. But, I'm sad to say I've also seen many couples who have refused companionship with one another, day in and day out, and consequently have very little that knits them together. When adultery has occurred in a marriage, this choice literally rips out every stitch and destroys everything. This couple must start the knitting process all over again if their marriage is to survive. May this never occur in your relationship!

The need for knitting

If you desire to keep yourself from loneliness or temptation in your marriage then purpose in your heart to allow God to change anything in your relationship that hinders companionship. You must be knit together in every area of your relationship. I say this because any area in your marriage left undone, will become the weak link in your defense. This is the very place Satan will tempt you and seek to divide you and your spouse.



May your hearts be knit together!

Therefore, begin right now by examining every aspect of your marriage relationship and determine where your companionship is strong and where you need work. What areas of your marriage should you consider? Take a hard look at your spiritual relationship with your mate, your emotional connection, your

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

verbal companionship, your parental unity, your recreational companionship, and your sexual relationship. Discuss these issues with your mate and determine to make whatever changes are necessary. If you neglect to take these actions, you leave yourself and your mate wide open for temptation and a further distancing of yourselves from each other. If companionship is God's goal and purpose for you in your marriage, shouldn't you make it yours too?

The key to knitting

In your marriage one key will unlock the path to deeper companionship: love. Paul prayed for the Colossian church that, *"their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love"* (Col. 2:2). If common relationships within the Body of Christ are knit together by love, how much more should the love between a husband and wife knit their lives together? However, remember that love involves choice. Love is the daily decision to give, serve, and communicate in a kind and respectful manner. These actions always knit two individuals together.

Therefore, if you sense a lack of companionship and a distance in your relationship with your mate, ask yourself in what ways you are choosing to live selfishly. I can assure you that in each of these selfish decisions you are choosing not to love. The easiest way to begin building companionship is to reverse course and simply do the opposite behavior in love. If you have been stubborn, yield your rights and seek a compromise. If you have been insensitive and harsh with your words, choose to speak kindly and listen more. The intimacy and friendship you desire and long for will result.

But, you may be thinking, *How do I get the willingness to make these changes? Where do I get the love? We are so far apart now. How can we get back to where we once were?* The answer is simple. If you want to return to your first love relationship with your mate, return to your first love with Christ. Why do I say this? Because every marital problem is first a spiritual problem. When you hold resentment, unforgiveness and bitterness toward your spouse, you are naturally distancing yourself from God by these sinful actions. First, get yourself right with the Lord, then you will be in a position to receive His grace and power to do what's right toward you mate. The

fruit of His Spirit reigning in you will always result in love (Gal. 5:22-23). If you want God's help to change you must confess your personal failures in your marriage and receive His forgiveness. Scripture declares, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Prov. 28:13).

Now let's consider the specific issues that must be addressed in your relationship and how to make these practical changes.

1. Spiritual companionship. Your spiritual relationship with each other is truly the core of your marriage and it enables all other areas of your relationship to work well. But, can you say that you have real spiritual companionship with your spouse? Do you pray together regularly concerning the needs in your marriage, your personal life or your family? Do you discuss the things that you are learning from your personal devotions or from the latest service you attended at church? These are the areas you need to address if you want to enrich and deepen your spiritual companionship with your mate. Sadly, many couples have very little desire to even take the time to develop this kind of companionship. Many times men and women confess that they have better spiritual fellowship with a friend at work or church than they do with their spouse. Is this the case with you? Are you willing to take specific steps to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with your spouse? If so, what should you do?

Love is the daily decision to give, serve, and communicate in a kind and respectful manner.

First, begin praying together. There is no single Scripture that commands couples to pray together because it is assumed that two Christians would naturally do so. Peter encouraged husbands and wives to have the right attitude toward each other so their *"prayers may not be hindered"* (1 Peter 3:7). In this passage, Peter assumed that married believers would pray together. It was also the most natural thing for Paul to encourage husbands to share spiritual truths with their

wives (Eph. 5:26). Why would these actions be naturally assumed? Because this kind of behavior is how Christians interact with one another. Therefore, take the time to share with your spouse what God is teaching you and pray for each other. Think about it. If anyone took the time to personally share himself with you in this manner, don't you think you'd grow into a deeper friendship with this individual?

If you want companionship to grow in your marriage, then make spiritual fellowship a priority. Determine the best time of day to pray and talk together. At times in your relationship, such as before children arrive or during retirement, it's easy to be spontaneous and take time to pray and fellowship with each other. Simply take the opportunities as they arise (Eph. 5:15-16). However, when you have multiple pressures such as your career requirements, your children's needs, or ministry responsibilities, you must purposely set time aside. If you don't make the time, you will never find the time.

2. Verbal companionship. To experience true friendship and companionship within your marriage you must be able to talk to each other. You must have the freedom to communicate your thoughts and ideas without the fear of ridicule or reprisals. All close personal relationships are based upon the premise, *I can talk to you about anything.* Do you have this freedom to exchange ideas and fellowship with your mate on any topic? Can you talk together concerning your daily schedule, your struggles and successes, your hopes and goals? This is true companionship. It produces a relationship with fullness and depth. The apostle John described the blessing of such fellowship in one of his benedictions: *"Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full"* (2 John 1:12). Note John's desire to communicate face to face. He expected to experience a fullness of joy as a result.

How can you develop this kind of verbal companionship? It's the result of diligent work over time. What kind of hard work am I talking about? You must be diligent on a daily basis to simply spend time communicating. Then you also have to work hard at addressing every weakness in your communication skills. What are

some of these problem areas in communication?

a.) Attitudes: Do you have an arrogant or condemning attitude when you talk to your mate? Or, are you indifferent and aloof in the relationship? Does your attitude communicate bitterness or irritation?

b.) Words: Are your words harsh and aggressive? Do you lie or use evasive words to avoid telling the truth? Do you use swear words?

c.) Actions: When you communicate do you interrupt your mate or regularly finish his or her sentences? Do you try and dominate the conversation by your many words, or do you use the silent treatment to control your spouse? Are you good at blame-shifting when your partner brings up one of your faults?

These are just some of the issues that must be addressed in every marriage relationship. If you allow the Lord to remove these faults, you will keep yourself from many troubles, and the fullness of joy that the apostle John described will be yours as well. Remember, Solomon said, *"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles"* (Prov. 21:23).

For further study on the subject of communication see Volume 5, Issue 2 and Volume 5, Issue 3 of this publication.

3. Emotional companionship. In addition to spiritual and verbal companionship, you must be able to connect emotionally with your loved one. If you refuse to come together emotionally it reveals the hardness and distance which has developed in your relationship. Can you share your deepest emotions with your mate, or are you afraid to reveal how you feel to each other? Do you give and receive emotional support when you have a bad day, or do you suffer alone? Can you laugh and cry together? Do you allow and accept your emotional differences or do you criticize one another? These are the issues that will indicate the depth or superficial nature of your relationship.

Paul wasn't afraid to share his feelings of grief and sorrow, or his hopes with those whom he loved. He revealed his deep emotions as he wrote to the Corinthians. *"But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow... For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you,*

with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you" (2 Cor. 2:1-4). Note that Paul felt comfortable in sharing the anguish and the tears that he shed over their struggles.

Becoming your mate's companion is the way God intended for you to become one-flesh with your spouse.

How can you get to the place in your relationship where you can share this way? Only as you develop a relationship of loving acceptance and support in your communication will you or your mate have the confidence to open up your heart to each other. Take one step at a time. You must grow in your individual spiritual walk, which enables you to communicate in a controlled and loving manner. Only in this atmosphere will you have the assurance that you can open up and share your deepest fears, joys, and sorrows. However, as you do, you automatically begin experiencing a depth of companionship you've never known before. Open your heart and begin to share in a new way.

4. Recreational companionship. Having fun together is an essential element of good companionship. You've probably heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together." This is a true statement. However, I would also add, "The family that plays together stays together." Remember when you first dated, all the fun things you did together? Why does this change?

Dating is obviously totally different from the daily relationship of marriage. In addition, when children arrive in your family they require the majority of your time and attention. However, this does not mean that you should forget to enjoy each other's company. When you fail to keep those fun recreational times together it's easy to lose the friendship and closeness you once had. It is clear that Solomon and his wife maintained a romantic relationship by consistently spending time away by themselves. The Bible reveals that Solomon invited his wife to take a walk with him and smell

the flowers (Song of Solomon 2:10-14). Solomon's wife also invited the king to spend time with her traveling through the villages (Song of Solomon 7:11-13).

Why not invite your spouse to spend some time with you this week? Make a date to take a walk after dinner, have lunch alone, or go to a special event together. It will do wonders for your relationship.

5. Parental companionship. One of the most divisive aspects of marriage is when children come into your home and you don't see eye-to-eye with your spouse on parenting issues. If you want to achieve a sense of teamwork in your relationship you must quickly establish a workable agreement concerning the training and discipline of your children. As you work together supporting and backing each other up, you will make parenting a source of companionship instead of conflict. Which is it for you? If parenting is a source of conflict between you, here are some practical ideas about how you can come together in this vital area.

First, realize that both of you have strengths and weaknesses in your personalities, skills in parenting, and stress levels. However, God has placed you together to temper and balance each other. Scripture declares that both mother and father are to be involved in training. Therefore, you must both work together toward one goal. Solomon made this truth clear when he said, *"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother"* (Prov. 1:8).

Second, sit down and discuss with your spouse what your goals are for your children and how you would like to reach them. God's commands have a very specific goal and purpose. Are your goals in harmony with His? Paul said, *"Now the purpose (goal) of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith"* (1 Tim. 1:5). These are just a few of the primary goals we should have for ourselves in our personal lives and for our children.

Third, ask God to open the eyes of your understanding to your own weaknesses in parenting, and defer to your spouse when you see a potential problem. For example, if you lose your temper during discipline or you give in and fail to discipline at all, let your mate take charge

in this area. If your view of parenting is not fully based on Scripture, and this creates conflict with your mate, begin studying the subject of parenting together to encourage discussion, compromise, and agreement.

Fourth, as much as possible, privately discuss together your child's wrong behaviors or attitudes and agree on a course of action. Then stand side-by-side and administer the discipline. Taking this action accomplishes two things. You won't be at odds with each other over an issue that is, in reality, your child's problem, and you will be demonstrating to your child a united front. As you take these actions, you will prevent your child from attempting to exploit your differences, which will dramatically decrease the potential for marital conflict.

For further study on the subject of parenting go to www.calvaryag.org and look for our series entitled *Parenting Principles*.

6. Sexual companionship. To ever hope to enjoy the true sexual companionship God intends for your marriage, you must establish and maintain companionship in all of the above areas. If you have little companionship spiritually, don't connect emotionally, or find it difficult to talk or have fun together, it will be very difficult to enjoy a satisfying sexual relationship with each other. However, if you are experiencing real companionship in these other areas and you are still struggling sexually, you must identify and resolve the underlying problems that are causing this breach. Where should you start?

First, don't minimize your sexual problems and think that sex is not important to your overall relationship. Let me explain by giving you an illustration. If you had an eight-cylinder engine in your car but it only had seven working spark plugs, how do you think the vehicle would perform? It would run, but very roughly. Why would it be rough going? Because the engine was designed to run on all eight cylinders, not seven. Likewise, your marriage is designed by God to only run smoothly and properly when you love and enjoy each other in *all* areas of your marriage. Your sexual relationship is one of those important areas. You were created by God with a body, a soul, and a spirit. Therefore, you must experience loving companionship in each of these areas.

How can you build your sexual companionship together? Choose to love and give yourself regularly to one another, meeting that need for intimacy and oneness. Scripture commands you not to deprive one another sexually, but to render the affection due your mate (1 Cor. 7:3-5). To withhold sexual relations from your spouse is direct disobedience to God's command and clearly is a sinful violation of your marriage vows. Yet, I'm amazed at how often Christian couples tell me in counseling that little or no sexual intimacy is occurring in their relationship. If you are refusing to meet your mate's sexual needs, be assured that you are putting your mate into harm's way and creating an opportunity for severe temptation. In addition, it is equally wrong for you to force yourself upon your spouse without his or her consent (1 Cor 7:5). Choosing to love means that you will be sensitive to each others needs.

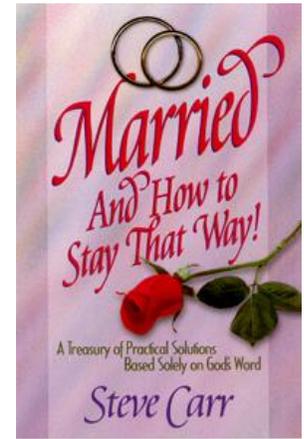
The most important thing to do is seek a solution to the problems that have divided you (spiritual, emotional, or physical). If you know what the sexual problems are, talk to one another and seek a solution. If this fails, get some counseling. Above all, ask God to change your heart, and choose to love your spouse. Then approach one another regularly for relations together. Choose to express real affection toward your mate while engaged in sexual relations. Don't allow sex to become purely a physical act with little emotion or affection. In addition, seek opportunities to just hold one another in a non-sexual way. Express your love and affection verbally and physically. This behavior only strengthens and encourages your sexual encounters.

If you would like more ideas concerning how to build your sexual relationship see chapter 18 in my book *Married And How To Stay That Way*.

In conclusion, if God has spoken to your heart and revealed an area in which you lack companionship, don't wait one more day before you take some action to change this deficiency. Ask God for His help to discern the practical steps that you should take to reach the goal of true companionship. You'll be glad you did!

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