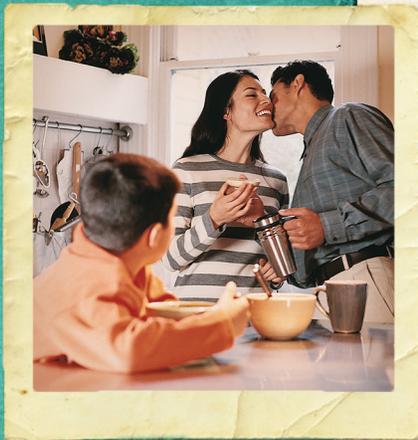


THRIVING
VALUES™



RAISING CHILDREN WHO HONOR MARRIAGE

What you need to know

BY JEFF JOHNSTON

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WHY THIS RESOURCE?

Marriage is a good gift from God to humanity, but it has clearly been undermined and damaged in our world. ***Now more than ever, Christians must be committed to the health of our own marriages and intentional about raising our children to understand and honor God's design for marriage.***

We've created this resource to help you give your children a solid foundation about marriage—using both words and actions. We begin by explaining the biblical foundation for marriage, seeing God's original plan for marriage and the deeper reality to which it points. Then, we explain why marriage is so important for adults, children and all society. Next, we offer some practical suggestions for modeling married love and commitment to your kids. Finally, we talk about the need for courage for you and your children as you uphold God's plan for marriage.

"Let marriage be held in honor among all."

—HEBREWS 13:4 (ESV)

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

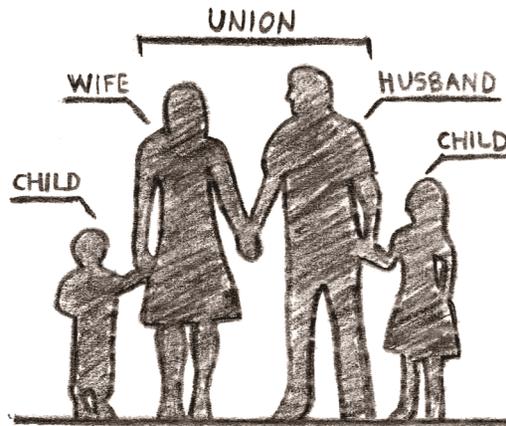
You've heard the words before—or something very similar—perhaps even dozens of times over the years:

"Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony."

These solemn and beautiful words, and those that follow, are taken from the traditional marriage service found in *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹ But whether a couple uses this order of service, a similar one, or even writes their own, we all know what's likely to follow:

- A brief lesson about marriage;
- An exchange of vows and rings;
- The pronouncement of the couple as husband and wife;
- A kiss;
- The introduction of the couple to the congregation; and
- A celebratory reception.

The service celebrating marriage contains, condensed into just a few sentences, some deep biblical truths. Let's look a little deeper at the words of the ceremony and unpack some of what is being referenced and taught:



“The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.”

This section of the service points to the Creation story to show that, in the very beginning, marriage between a man and woman was designed by God. We read in the book of Genesis:

“But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. The man said,

**JESUS MAKES IT
VERY CLEAR THAT
MARRIAGE BRINGS
TOGETHER A MAN AND
A WOMAN AND THE
TWO BECOME ONE.**

‘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.’

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:20–24 (ESV)

The marriage covenant is a promise or agreement; it is a unique bond that unites a man and woman together, body, soul and spirit.

As the service says, Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding celebration in Cana. Another passage of scripture, from Matthew, gives Jesus’ views on the subject. When asked about marriage and divorce, He pointed back to the Creation story, saying:

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and

the two shall become one flesh’?

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matthew 19:4–6 (ESV)

Jesus makes it very clear that marriage brings together a man and a woman and the two become one. **He also reminds us that**

what is joined together should not be separated; marriage is to be a lifelong, committed, monogamous relationship.

The next part of the ceremony says this:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

—EPHESIANS 5:31 (ESV)

“The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is

not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.”

What we find here are some of the unique purposes for marriage, as expressed by God in Scripture. These purposes include:

- Bringing the couple mutual joy;
- Providing help and support for each other, in good times and in difficulty;
- Bringing forth children; and
- Raising children to know and love God.

Finally, the wedding service points to the deeper reality of marriage, what the apostle Paul calls a “mystery,” now revealed in Christ:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Ephesians 5:31–32 (ESV)

Paul initially quotes from the Genesis account, but then goes on to teach that marriage is more than the union of one couple. ***Marriage is a picture, illustrating a deeper reality. The union of a husband and wife depicts for us the union of Christ and His Church. Teaching our children to respect and honor marriage will include discussing this profound truth.***

WHAT IF I’VE MADE MISTAKES OR IF I’M STRUGGLING IN MY MARRIAGE?

Some of you may be asking yourselves, “How can I talk to my kids about marriage when I’m divorced?” Or, “What if I had children outside of marriage?” Or, “What if my marriage isn’t the best?”

We understand your concerns, and we want you to know: When it comes to relationships, marriage and sexuality, everyone has failed in one way or another.

We've all fallen short.

Thankfully, God gives us a way to deal with our sins and failures. Through Jesus Christ we can receive forgiveness, freedom and restoration. So

we can still learn, grow and teach our children well—helping them to have thriving values, marriages and families. ***This issue is so significant that we encourage you to move ahead and talk to your children about God's purposes and intentions for marriage, in spite of any problems or failures from your past.***

If you're struggling with your marriage right now, we encourage you to call Focus on the Family for a one-time, complimentary consultation from a Christian perspective. We also offer referrals for licensed Christian counselors in your area, which you can access by searching on FocusOnTheFamily.com/FindACounselor.

UNDERSTAND WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS: FOR CHILDREN, MEN AND WOMEN, AND THE WORLD

Scripture is not alone in upholding the value and goodness of marriage. Years of social research have given us mounds of data that illustrate the ways in which marriage benefits children, husbands and wives, and all society. Here are just a few examples.

MARRIAGE IS GOOD FOR CHILDREN

Having both a mother and father matters to a child in countless ways. It takes a man and a woman to make a baby, and marriage is what holds that man and woman together to create the healthiest environment for that child.

There are numerous, respected studies in the social sciences that demonstrate how children benefit when raised by their married mom and dad. This is just a short list from one study, which found, in general, children in this family structure:

- Live longer, healthier lives, both physically and mentally;

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY COUNSELORS

For a free consultation with a Focus on the Family counselor by phone, call 1-800-A-Family (232-6459) weekdays 6:00AM to 8:00PM (Mountain Time).

Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counselor or chaplain to return a call to you as soon as possible.

You may also reach our counselors online by searching on FocusOnTheFamily.com/FindACounselor.

- Perform better in school;
- Are more likely to attend college;
- Are less likely to be violent or sexually active; and
- Are more likely to have **successful marriages**.²

MARRIAGE IS GOOD FOR ADULTS

Marriage isn't just good for the kids; it's also good for men and women. Research helps us count the ways in which marriage generally helps men and women, as it:

- Protects against feelings of loneliness;
- Protects women from domestic violence;
- Provides the highest levels of sexual pleasure and fulfillment for both men and women;
- Enhances a parent's ability to parent; and
- Increases individual **earnings and savings**.³

MARRIAGE IS GOOD FOR SOCIETY

Do you want to fight poverty?
Stop violence against women?
Help children succeed?
Marriage is the ultimate "social justice" response to these

WHEN A HUSBAND AND WIFE STAY TOGETHER AND RAISE THEIR KIDS, THERE ARE BENEFITS FOR ALL SOCIETY.

concerns. When a husband and wife stay together and raise their kids, there are benefits for all society. Their children are less likely to live in poverty, to abuse alcohol and drugs, and to be in trouble with the law.

FATHERLESS CHILDREN ARE:

- 5 X MORE LIKELY TO LIVE IN POVERTY AND COMMIT CRIME
- 9 X MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOLS
- 20 X MORE LIKELY TO BE IMPRISONED

In his 2008 Father's Day speech, then-U.S. Senator Barack Obama recognized this important role of marriage for all society, saying:

*"We know the statistics—that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and twenty times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home, or become teenage parents themselves. And the **foundations of our community are weaker because of it**."*

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12 (ESV)

Many young people today want to make a difference in the world: to help alleviate hunger and poverty; to create jobs; and to help children receive an education. God’s original plan for marriage contributes positively toward all these goals. When we understand the just and beneficial role marriage plays in the lives of children, men and women, and all of society, we can and should teach this reality to our children. Preserving marriage between a man and a woman is an effective social justice solution, as it is foundational to all society.

MODEL HEALTHY MARRIAGE TO YOUR CHILDREN

What a privilege we have as married believers to demonstrate a healthy marriage to our children and to a hurting world! All marriages are a work in progress; nevertheless, we encourage you to continually work to strengthen your relationship with your spouse, especially for the sake of your kids.

This doesn’t have to be complicated. Here are a few simple ideas to demonstrate to your children that you love your spouse and are committed to your marriage:

Resources

- Dig deeper on the various aspects of marriage at Focus on the Family’s [Social Issues channel](#).¹⁶
- ***Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society***,⁵ by Glenn Stanton.
- ***Why Family Matters: A Modern Look at an Ancient Truth***⁶, Focus on the Family, 2013.
- ***Marriage Done Right: One Man, One Woman***,⁷ by Jim Daly.

WRITE LOVE NOTES

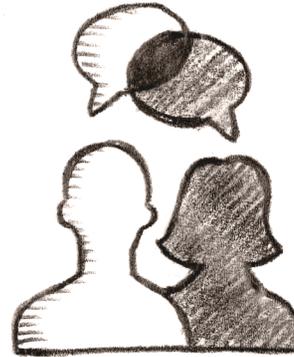
Write your spouse a love note and post it on the fridge or on the dashboard of the car where your children will be sure to spot it. Or, leave a card where the kids will find it and, with your direction, can give it to your spouse.

*“To my wife,
I love you and will always stay with you.”*

*“To my love,
You grow more beautiful every year. I love being married to you.”*

*"To my husband,
Thank you for working so
hard and for taking care of
me and our family. I love you."*

It doesn't have to be long—just
enough to embarrass your kids!



*"I promised your Dad I would stay with
him, regardless of the circumstances.
I respect your father and will never leave
him. We made a covenant—a commitment,
a promise—before God."*

*"It's sad your friend's parents are divorcing.
I want you to know I made a promise that
I will not divorce your Mom. I will stay with you—
that's how important you both are to me."*

DEMONSTRATE AFFECTION

One of our co-workers says he is intentional about touching his wife—in a non-sexual way—at least 10 times a day! In the car, at the table, watching television or at church. A hug, a caress, holding hands or an arm around the shoulder are nonverbal actions that speak volumes to your spouse and your children. (And yes, some of this public display of affection should be in front of the children!)

SPEAK LOVING WORDS

Author and speaker Josh McDowell says that the greatest security for children today is to **know their father loves their mother⁸** and that their parents will **never divorce^{8A}**. So tell your children:

*"I love your Mom. When we married I
vowed to always stay with her."*

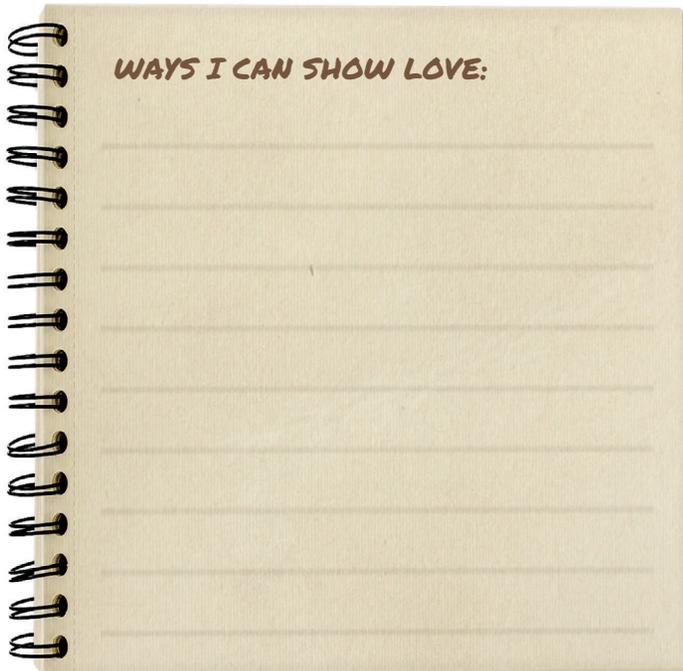
WATCH YOUR WEDDING VIDEO

If you have a video of your wedding, pull it out some time, make some popcorn and watch it with the kids! Or, pull out your wedding photographs and talk to your children about the commitment you made when you married. Let them see the vows you made to each other and tell them you intend to keep them:

*"Didn't your Mom look beautiful the day
we married? And she looks even more
beautiful today!"*

*"I'm so happy I married your Dad. What a great
day—sharing our promises in front of family
and friends."*

*"When we married, I made a public promise
to stay with your Mom, and with God's help
I always will!"*



PRAY A BLESSING

At meals, devotions or bedtime, bless your spouse with prayer:

“Lord Jesus, thank You for Mommy. We love her and thank You for her kindness, patience and love.”



“Father in Heaven, encourage and bless Daddy as he works to provide for us. Thank You for his strength and creativity. May he know You love him and that we love him, too!”

“Father, thank You for our marriage. I pray we would love and serve You together all our lives and we’d reflect Your image to others.”

Resources

- The Focus on the Family [Marriage Channel](#)¹⁷
- *As For Me And My House*,⁹ by Walter Wangerin.
- *Crazy Little Thing Called Marriage*,¹⁰ by Greg and Erin Smalley.
- Take the Focus on the Family Marriage Assessment at FocusOnTheFamily.com/MarriageAssessment.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

—THE LORD’S WORD TO JOSHUA,
JOSHUA 1:8-9 (ESV)

THE NEED FOR COURAGE

The institution of marriage has been greatly undermined in recent years, and Christians are deeply concerned about the state of sexuality and marriage—in the church and in the world. We see the wreckage caused when people stray from God’s clear intentions:

- An increase in divorce, cohabitation and sex outside of marriage;

- A large number of children growing up without a father;
- The entertainment world and the Internet awash in pornography and distorted messages about sexuality;
- A horrific number of abortions;
- Millions of individuals with sexually transmitted infections each year; and,
- A redefinition of marriage by the highest court in the nation.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THAT WE CAN LOVINGLY DISAGREE WITH OTHERS.

who believe marriage is only the lifelong union of a man and woman as being bigoted, intolerant and narrow-minded. Some have argued that Christian views of marriage should no longer be tolerated in the public square.

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

What does this mean for us, as we teach our children to respect and honor God's design for marriage? Here are just a few thoughts and suggestions:

- Teach your children that we can lovingly disagree with others—and model healthy dialogue and disagreement with your spouse.
- Communicate that not everyone shares our beliefs and values—including what Christians believe about marriage.
- Explain that they may be mocked and belittled for their beliefs about sexuality and marriage.
- Use Bible stories of courageous people—think of Noah, Esther, Daniel, Jesus, the Apostles and many others—to demonstrate how others have bravely stood for faith, truth and righteousness.

CULTURE ATTEMPTS TO REDEFINE MARRIAGE

The 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision—*Obergefell v. Hodges*¹¹—changed marriage to be the union of any two people, not just a husband and wife. It's hard to overstate the impact of that decision, as the Court dramatically redefined marriage. The full force and power of the law now stands in opposition to Christians who hold to a biblical sexual ethic. As a result, Christians are increasingly marginalized on a variety of fronts.



Many in the media, education and the government describe those

- Share stories of bold men and women, both current examples and those throughout history, who have stood for God’s truth in the face of opposition.
- Pray with your children to stand courageously in the face of growing opposition.
- Help them memorize Scripture about trusting the Lord and His constant presence with us and for us.

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

—MATTHEW 28:18–20 (ESV)

ADDITIONAL FOCUS ON THE FAMILY RESOURCES

“How to Teach Your Children About Marriage,” is a Thriving Values companion guide on marriage, which offers parents—and grandparents—many ideas and suggestions for passing on a biblical view of marriage to your children:

Adventures in Odyssey® radio drama on the story of Esther¹²

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Legacy of Courage and Integrity”¹³ (Digital)

Finally, keep informed and stay engaged with these specific **Thriving Values** resources to help you respond to the culture:

- Subscribe to the weekly **Thriving Values eNewsletter**.¹⁴
- Subscribe to **Focus on the Family Citizen**® magazine.¹⁵
- Visit our **Social Issues channel**¹⁶ on Focus on the Family’s website.



Now that you've successfully completed **"Raising Children Who Honor Marriage,"** we want to give you

a complimentary copy of **"How to Teach Your Children About Marriage."**

This companion guide is filled with creative and practical ideas for helping your children develop a life-long and biblical view of marriage.

DOWNLOAD NOW

CONTACT US:

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We want your values to thrive in today's culture, so we invite you to check out our host of helpful resources at **FocusOnTheFamily.com/socialissues**

Endnotes

1. The Book of Common Prayer, "Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage," The Seabury Press, 1979, p. 423.
2. Why Marriage Matters, Third Edition, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2011); see also: "30 Years of Research: A Child Deserves a Mother and a Father," <http://bit.ly/honormarriage1>
3. For books and articles about the benefits of marriage, check out "Dig Deeper: More Research Demonstrating a Child Needs Both a Mother and Father," Focus on the Family, 2008, <http://bit.ly/honormarriage2a>
4. Text of Obama's fatherhood speech, *Politico*, 15 June 2008, <http://bit.ly/honormarriage3>
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15. <http://bit.ly/1KEVdOH>
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