

Marriage Is Meant for Making Children Disciples of Jesus, Part 1

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes that the primary purpose of marriage is to make children disciples of Jesus, highlighting the importance of spiritual parenting over biological parenthood.

Duration: 38:03

Scripture: Ephesians 5:23

Topics: "Christian Marriage", "Discipleship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of marriage as a reflection of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His church. It highlights the responsibility of parents, especially fathers, to raise children to be followers of Jesus, whether through biological birth, adoption, or other means. The ultimate goal is to show God's character to children through the love and unity of parents, creating an atmosphere where children can experience and understand the love of Christ and the church.

Transcript

Father, I'm so thankful for your ministry of the Holy Spirit to me personally, secured by Christ, and that even while we sing, you bring to my mind, you're my Son. I never let my sons down. Never.

So go preach. So thank you for that reminder of glorious blood-bought truth. And my prayer for those in these services, Lord, downtown campus and south campus, and here in this room now, who don't know you as Father, bought by the blood of Christ, adopted because of Christ's great work, would be saved.

We just want them to be saved. And so I pray that great work to be done beyond all my ability. And then, Lord, as we continue these series on marriage, would you do a healing work for marriages, and a redeeming work for marriages, and a solidifying work for marriages, and a preparatory work for marriages.

Oh God, how much is at stake to help me to that end. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen. I have tried to show in the eleven messages or so gone by, that the main meaning of marriage is to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His church.

In other words, marriage was designed by God most deeply, and most importantly, to be a parable or a drama of the way Christ loves His church, or the way the church follows and loves Christ. That's the most important thing for a husband to know, and that's the most important thing for a wife to know about this

relationship called marriage. And the key text has been all along, Ephesians 5, 23 to 25, which goes like this, for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and He's Himself its Savior.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. So don't be so familiar with this passage that it doesn't stun you.

Where else in the world do people talk about marriage like this? What block on Nicolet Avenue is anybody saying this? Marriage is as Christ loved the church. Marriage is as the church submits to Christ. Marriage is as Christ loved the church.

The most important thing about marriage is not marriage. We're not the center. We're not the point.

We're pointing, and what we're pointing to is Christ and the church and this magnificent reality on which marriage was modeled. Marriage modeled on Christ and the church and pointing to Christ and the church. That's the most important meaning of marriage.

It's all in these words, as, as Christ, as the church, as Christ. Marriage is magnificent because it points to something magnificent. It's not magnificent in itself.

It gains its magnificence from what it was modeled on and what it's pointing toward. We draw down the glory of this relationship from another one. The love between a man and a woman in marriage is a magnificent thing because it reflects a magnificent thing.

That's where it gets its magnificence. The reason people don't feel that they're in something marvelous, stunning, magnificent is because they don't talk this way. They don't think this way.

Marriage is just the way you mate. We're just advanced maters. That's what you're being taught, isn't it? No, that's not where we're going to live.

So low, so small, so groveling an animal like a natural. This is a glorious thing and it's glorious because of where it came from and what it's pointing to, namely the covenant-keeping love between the Son of God and His chosen bride, the apple of His eye. Now, all that's review.

Where I'm going now, we'll continue this series, God willing, through June. Where I'm going now is to say that another meaning of marriage, I said that's the main one, another meaning of marriage is marriage is for making babies, disciples of Jesus. There's a double meaning.

The little dots in the title in your worship folder and that pause that I just used is to communicate a double meaning. Marriage is for making babies, disciples of Jesus. And there's a huge truth that I mean to communicate there, which I'm sure is not yet communicated, but I hope will be in that little pause and those dots.

Having children is not the main meaning of marriage. It's an important one. It's a biblical one, a good one.

It's a beautiful one. It's a painful one. It's a glorious one.

So I say marriage is for making children. And then I add making them disciples of Jesus. Marriage is for making children disciples of Jesus.

And here the focus shifts from procreation to hoped for, lived for regeneration. When God ordained baby having through marriage, the point was not to fill the earth with warm bodies. The point was to fill the earth with worshippers of God, lovers of Jesus.

That's the point of having babies. Fill the earth with worshippers of God. More babies, more worshippers.

That's the point. Anybody that doesn't understand that doesn't know why they're having babies. It's all about making more worshippers.

That's what it's for. Babies are important. Worshippers are more important.

What becomes of babies if they don't become worshippers? You don't even want to think about. This is important for people struggling with infertility and a lot of other kinds of people, single people. The effect of what I'm saying, the implication of what I'm saying is that having babies is not ultimate.

Pursuing making babies followers of Jesus is ultimate and they don't have to be born to you. They don't even have to be in your family, at least your biological one. This is huge.

I really hope you get the meaning of those little dots before we're done. When we focus marriage, make children disciples of Jesus, the meaning of marriage becomes we together, if God wills, will make babies. But if He doesn't will, we make babies to followers of Jesus.

Somehow, somewhere, we're pursuing children following Jesus. We're getting to talk about the original plan of creation for men and women to marry and have children. That's number one.

A good thing. Number two, I want to talk about this fallen world where having babies is not an absolute thing. It's not an ultimate thing.

Producing children in marriage is not the absolute meaning of marriage. Not to produce children in marriage doesn't make your marriage less a marriage, less a God-pleasing marriage. And third, I want to step back and begin where I'll finish on Father's Day, how marriage is designed to make babies disciples of Jesus.

I won't talk about how to make babies. I will talk about how to make babies disciples of Jesus. This is a church, and we do that elsewhere.

That's what families are for. Number one, the meaning of marriage, normally by God's design, includes giving birth to children and raising them in the Lord. Here's Genesis 126.

God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created him, male and female, male and female, from the original, that's His design, male and female, He created them.

And God said, and God blessed them, and said to them, be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Be fruitful, multiply, have babies, make children. Genesis 9, the flood is over, eight people are left, and God says, God blessed Noah, or the scripture says, God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth.

So that was God's design, that was His plan. Marriage, male and female, is for making children, and filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, like the waters cover the sea. And all through the scripture, this is esteemed as a very good thing.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, the psalmist says, are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Jesus, of all the people in the Bible, esteemed children most highly. Others didn't get it. Jesus, the original, true, godly, manly man, got it, and had to scold his macho Peter types to get it.

They were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. We've got more important things to do. And Jesus saw it, and was indignant with them, with His disciples.

Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them. Can I give you a paraphrase of this next line? For they too are parables. For to such belong the kingdom of God.

Unless you turn to become a child, like a child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. So don't keep these parables away. So there it is, the first point.

A main meaning of marriage is, it is for having children, and bringing them to know the King. Unstoppable, unchangeable King, can raise them that way, so they know Him that way. Number two, second of three observations or points so far.

Even though that's a main meaning of marriage, normally marriages give birth to children, it's not an absolute meaning, and it's not an absolute call on every marriage. In this fallen sinful age, desperate to know the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, nature does not dictate whether we beget children. The decision about whether to conceive children is not ultimately a decision about what's natural.

It's about what magnifies the Redeemer. We're not just ordinary people. We've been bought with a price.

We live for another, Christ. We will make our decisions that way. There's an analogy, singles.

Remember the message, everybody listen to the analogy with singleness and children having. The singleness question and the children question are analogous in the Bible. They compare.

Genesis 2.18, on singleness now, it is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Sounds like, this is the normal thing to do.

This is the right thing to do. Not good for man to be alone. Everybody should marry.

Then, you get to the New Testament, after the fall, and you have Paul, the single man, saying, I wish that all were as I myself am. Oh, how he prized his singleness and the radical devotion to Christ, untrammelled by anything that would entangle him in any relationship other than what that one demanded. Oh, he loved that, calling on his life.

Painful, I'm sure. Lonely at times. And he said, I wish everybody were like this.

But each has his own gift. Okay, each has his own gift. You can see him.

Each has his own gift, one of another. I think that in view of the present distress, he says, it is good for a person to remain as he is, namely, single. So, you have Genesis 2.18, it's not good for man to be alone.

You have Paul, we wish everybody were single. And what you have here is the relativizing of the natural order because of the new redemptive reality of fallenness and redemption. If there were no sin in the world, it would work.

But now that there are people perishing everywhere, and that is so vastly more important than being married or having children, that some people will know themselves called, that's all my life. I'll live for the King, unaffected by any other natural relationship like marriage. Now, my argument is, the issue of children is analogous to that.

So, you read in the Old Testament, be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. That's normal, that's good, that's beautiful. Marry and have lots of babies.

That's what the Bible says one should do. And then you read this in Mark 10.29. Jesus said, truly I say to you, there's no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake in the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time. Houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

The focus shifts on to the hundred children you can have, if you don't have the other kind. The family of God takes precedent over the biological family in the New Testament. I've said this, and I'll keep saying it, the supreme relationships are the relationships that are supernatural.

It's wonderful when they're the same, when natural and supernatural relationships, but they're not always the same. Marriage is for having children, but not absolutely. Marriage is absolutely for pursuing making children into followers of Jesus.

It may be that you do it through adoption. It may be that you do it through foster care. It may be that you do it through having a backyard Bible club in your home.

It may be that you do it by making your house so hospitable that it's the place all the kids in the neighborhood like to go after school or in the evening. It may be that it means working in the nursery. It may be that your nieces and nephews need to have you around more.

It may be that your little Sunday school class will miss you during the summer. There are a hundred ways to have a hundred children. That's an absolute.

We will seek to make children followers of Jesus, whether we give birth to them or not. I'll give you another text on this issue of how the children issue is like the singleness issue. Romans 9.8. It's not the children of the flesh that are the children of God, but the children of promise are counted as offspring.

That's a radical verse. It's not children born of the flesh that are the children of God. They may or may not be.

It's the children of promise who are counted as offspring and those are the offspring that last forever. We want to live for children who will last forever. Would that it would be our own.

More tears are poured out over that issue than any other perhaps. Another text. 1st Corinthians 4.15. For though, Paul says to the Corinthians, for though you have countless guides in Christ, you don't have many fathers.

I became your father in Christ through the gospel. What about the dad? This is so supremely important for the biblical writers. I became your father.

What does he mean by that? Through my preaching, God caused you to be born again. That's what I mean. Seed came out of my mouth in the Word and you were born of God.

Now I'm your father. That's how you have a hundred children. One more verse on this second point.

We move to the third. Romans 16.13. These little asides. Great Rufus, chosen in the Lord and also his mother who has been a mother to me as well.

That's full. That's very full. She isn't my mother.

She's just becoming my mother. This is moving from the language of nature to the language of care and the language of affection and the language of love and the language of spiritual bonding, which is vastly more important than natural relationships. Again, I say, wonderful when the natural relationships can be both, but they aren't always.

So that's all I want to say on number two. The second point was, the first point was, it is natural, good, right, normal to be pursued that we marry and have children. Lots of them.

I want every family at Bethlehem with three, five, eight, nine, ten children to feel totally affirmed by this message. Okay? I love big families. That's the first point.

The second point is, that's not absolute. Having these babies is not an absolute calling on marriage. It's a beautiful calling.

It's a glorious calling, a right calling, good, biblical calling, not absolute. The absolute calling is, make babies believers or pursue making children followers of Jesus, whatever way you can as a couple. That's a given, whether the others are there or not.

Now, here's my last third point. Marriage, as an image of Christ and the church in covenant relation, is where God has designed for children to become followers of Jesus. So let's read our text.

You wonder, where is the text in this message? Here it is. Ephesians 6, 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. So, this is not a sermon to children mainly, though I hope they are learning heaps about marriage.

This is about parents. So children, obey your parents. So these children have parents.

Two of them. Would that every child could have two. Not always possible.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with the promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger. Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Now, I have five very brief observations about that setting for bringing children up that way.

All of it leading to next Sunday, where we do Father's Day. Observation number one. The father has a leading responsibility in bringing the children up in the nurture, the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

Notice, verse 1. The word parents is used. That's a mother and a father. Children, obey your parents.

So obviously, moms are telling them things to do. That's why I said the fighter verse tonight was so closely related to the sermon. Keep your father's commandments.

Do not forsake your mother's teaching. Obey this woman. When she opens her mouth, you do that.

And when she teaches, you hold to that. So you have a mother and a father and a child responding submissively. That's the design.

However, when you get to verse 4, it says fathers could have said parents, didn't though. Why? Because we have a special responsibility. He's boring in on the fathers now.

Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger. I'm going to talk next week about how you don't do that. But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

I'll talk about this. First observation. Parents both are engaged in this process of bringing these children to be followers of Jesus, but dads have a special leading responsibility.

That's observation number one. Number two, both mother and father are to do this together. I've already said it, but I'll make it a separate point.

They're to do this together. Children, obey your parents, mother and father. Fighter verse.

Son, keep your father's commandment. Don't forsake your mother's teaching. So both mother and father bear responsibility in bringing up the children.

Point one, special fathers. Point two, both. Number three, it's important that mother and father be united in this effort.

Not always possible. Sometimes dad or mom is not a believer. They're supposed to stay married, the Bible says.

And what you do there, among a thousand other hard efforts, is to try to talk through some common ground for how to discipline these kids and what can be expected of them on our shared common ground. You work at it. Not easy.

However, the ideal is mom and dad have talked through their differences before they got married. You're single here. That's one of the things you talk about.

Do you know that? How do you discipline kids? When do you have devotions? Do you have devotions? Do I lead them or do you lead them? How long should they be? Do you spank? I spank. And on and on and on. These are pre-marriage huge issues to get unity on.

Well, if you blew that and you're already married, get working on it. Because you need a united front with these children. None of this dad going, I wouldn't say that.

And the kids, cool. Dad says, he wouldn't say that. Don't ever do that.

We are one before these children. You talk behind the scenes about whether you would have done it that way. Noel and I do that all the time.

Would you want to say it that way again? Or she to me? But not in front of the child. I think all that's implied here in terms of their oneness and their togetherness. Don't confuse the children.

Work through your differences. Get a united front. Stand together.

Don't let them manipulate you. Kids are smart manipulators of dad's sappy personality or mom's tenderness or whatever. They're going to work you over.

So get this thing fixed together behind the scenes. Strong, upfront, tender, firm, one. And they look back and forth.

Well, no use here. Number four, we're almost done. The most fundamental task of a mother and a father is to show God to the children.

Have you thought this? Children know their parents before they know God. This is a huge responsibility. They don't even know God exists.

And they know their parents so well. One year goes by, two years, three years, and they're knowing their parents. Day in, day out, they're knowing their parents.

And they don't know anything about God. Or do they? Every dad and mom should be on your face desperate to become more Godlike. That's our main business.

You can read a thousand books. But if you don't have time to read a thousand books, fall down before God and say, shape me into your image for this child. They will experience the kind of authority there is in the universe before they know there's a universe.

They will experience the kind of justice there is in the universe before they know there's a universe. They will experience the kind of love there is in the universe before they know there's a universe. Before they know that there's a God of authority and a God of justice and a God of love.

Guess what? They'll recognize Him if they've seen Him. He'll fit. That was the kind of authority.

That authority I see in the Bible, unstoppable, unchangeable. I've seen that. I don't mess with my dad.

And the tenderness of God seen in Jesus Christ. Holding little children. Touching lepers.

I've seen that. I've seen it in my mom. I've seen it in my dad.

Why wouldn't I want to believe this God? This is huge. The main task of a husband and a wife in bringing children to be followers of Jesus is to be like Jesus. That's the main job.

It's real simple. I mean, it's impossible, but it's not complicated. It doesn't take a long book to say that.

I mean, I'm a simple person. I read slow. If I have to have ten points to follow, I remember the first two.

So, just get this one. If you're like me, day and night strive to be changed by faith into the image of Jesus. That's parenting.

It's not easy, but it isn't all that complicated. Finally, number five, and then we'll be done. God has ordained, we're coming full circle now, you'll God has ordained that children come to be followers of Jesus

and worshippers of God in a marriage because the most fundamental meaning of marriage is to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church.

And that's the atmosphere in which children are to be enfolded. Children are to live in the covenant-keeping love of Christ and the church, modeled by these parents, so that they don't just see God just, God loving, God strong, God firm, God tender. They see Christ dying for a bride, a bride submitting to a Christ, and then being a part of the family would feel so.

So, he has set up a very beautiful thing in marriage as the place where children are brought to be followers of Christ. So, may the Lord grant us a united focus in what really matters in marriage, united husbands and wives, loving like Christ and the church, and children, by grace, seeing and loving and wanting to make their home one day.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Rnmjblw3bb4.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/marriage-is-meant-for-making-children-disciples-of-jesus-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net