

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

A Study Guide by Rev. John T. Pless


Introduction

What follows is a Bible study on marriage. We approach this Bible study using the Service of Marriage (*Lutheran Worship Agenda*, p.120-124) as our guide. Since marriage does not belong to the couple, but to the Lord God who is marriage's Author, we receive marriage as a gift to be used according to His Word. Faith receives marriage according to the Lord's Word. Christians refer to marriage as an "estate" or "order," which is to state that marriage is not a human creation but a divinely instituted reality. It is a "calling" or "vocation."

As we begin these sessions of preparation for your marriage, I invite you to make this Collect your prayer as you ask God to bless and bring to completion this preparation:

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help, that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you we may glorify your name and finally by your mercy obtain eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

A. Invocation

P In the name of the Father and of the  Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen

The rite of marriage is a Divine Service in which God gathers us together in His Name. In the Old Testament we are taught that where God causes His name to dwell there He is present to bless. Note these passages:

II Chronicles 6:17-21

Numbers 6:22-27

It is in the confidence of the Lord's Name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that we come before Him. "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). It is in that name that we were baptized (see Matthew 28:19). It is in the Lord's name that you will live out your life together to His glory. Read Colossians 3:15-17. In light of this passage discuss how the name of the Triune God will shape your life together as husband and wife. Take special note of these elements:

1. The ruler-ship of the peace of God in your marriage.
2. The place of the Word and worship of God in your home. (See Romans 12:1-2)

B. Statement of Christian Marriage

P We are gathered here in the sight of God and of his Church to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in holy marriage. This is an honorable estate, which God himself has instituted and blessed, and by which he gives us a picture of the very communion of Christ and his bride, the Church. God has both established and sanctified marriage and has promised to bless therein all who love and trust in him and who seek to give him their faithful worship and service, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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 inadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

These two paragraphs summarize God's design of marriage as well as His intentions for marriage. What marriage is also determines how we are to receive it.

1. The first paragraph describes marriage as a vocation or calling. It is an estate that has been clothed with honor by our Creator. By His Word He declares marriage to be holy. Read I Timothy 4:1-4 and Hebrews 13:4. How is the holiness of marriage to be guarded?
2. The explanation to the First Commandment in the *Small Catechism* tells us that we are "to fear, love, and trust in God above all things." How does this shape our view of marriage?
1. Notice the emphasis on "oneness" in the second paragraph. This oneness is given expression in sexual intercourse, yet it is more than a physical unity; it is also a unity of heart and mind. How will you seek to enhance and guard the oneness of your marriage? How does that oneness also allow for your individuality?
2. Note carefully that marriage according to God's design is built for a twofold purpose:
 - a. It is intended for the mutual joy of man and woman and the help and comfort which they give one another in prosperity and adversity. (See Genesis 2:18)
 - b. When it is God's will, the procreation of children and their nurture in the Christian faith.

Genesis 1:28

Psalm 128

Deuteronomy 6:3-9

Ephesians 6:1-4

C. The Word of God

1. Genesis 2:18-24

P The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name,. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 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. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Gen. 2:18-24)

- A. How does God establish marriage?
- B. How does this passage describe the “cohesiveness” of marriage? (See I Corinthians 11:11-12)
- C. What does it mean for you “to leave father and mother”?

2. Ephesians 5:21-33

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery-but I am

talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Eph. 5:21-33)

- A. What does it mean “to submit”? (See Luke 2:51 and I Corinthians 15:28)
- B. How does the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church, shed light on God’s intention in the hierarchy which He has created within the marriage bond?

3. Matthew 19:4-6

[Jesus replied to the Pharisees, "Have you not read that] at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matt. 19:4-6)

- A. Review the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed and its Explanation in the *Small Catechism*. How is our understanding of Creation foundational for a right view of marriage?

The First Article: Creation


I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.


What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

- B. What does Scripture teach about divorce? (See Malachi 2:16)

D. Declaration of Intent

 name , will you have this woman to be your wife, to live with her in holy marriage according to the Word of God? Will you love her, comfort her, honor her, and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, be husband to her as long as you both shall live?

 I will.

7. The pastor asks the bride:

P name , will you have this man to be your husband, to live with him in holy marriage according to the Word of God? Will you love him, comfort him, honor him, obey him, and keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, be wife to him as long as you both shall live?

R I will.

1. Marriage is, as we have already noted, an “estate” or “order” created and sustained by God. What are you saying as you say “I will” in answer to these questions?
2. The bride promises to obey her husband. How do you understand this obedience? (See I Peter 3:6)

E. The Vows and the Exchange of Rings

9. The bridegroom, taking the right hand of the bride and facing her, says after the pastor:

I, name , in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you, name , to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death parts us, and I pledge you my faithfulness.

10. The bride, in the same way, says after the pastor:

I, name , in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you, name to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death parts us, and I pledge you my faithfulness.

11. The bride and bridegroom exchange rings, saying:

Receive this ring as a pledge and token of wedded love and faithfulness.

12. The pastor may speak a blessing upon the pledging of their love with the exchange of rings:

P Grant your blessing,, O Lord, to your servants name and name that they may be ever mindful of their solemn pledge and, trusting in your mercy, abound evermore in love all their days; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. <264>


R Amen

1. What is a vow? (See Numbers 30:2 and Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

2. What is the content of the vow made in marriage?
3. How is “faithfulness” the key word in the marriage vow?

F. Declaration and Blessings

13. The bride and bridegroom kneel, and the pastor says:

P Now that name and name have consented together in holy marriage, have given themselves to each other by their solemn pledges, and have declared the same before God and these witnesses, I pronounce them to be husband and wife, in the name of the Father and of the  Son and of the Holy Spirit.

What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.

G Amen

P The almighty and gracious God abundantly grant you his favor and sanctify and bless you with the blessing given our first parents in paradise that you may please him in both body and soul and live together in holy love until your life's end.

G Amen

1. Note the four elements in the Declaration: (a) consent; (b) pledges; (c) public statement; and (d) the name and Word of God.
2. What is the “blessing given our first parents in paradise”? What is the purpose of that blessing? (See Genesis 1:28-31)

G. Prayers and Blessing

P Let us pray.

Almighty, everlasting God, our heavenly Father, grant that by your blessing name and name may live together according to your Word and promise. Strengthen them in faithfulness and love toward each other. Sustain and defend them in all trial and temptation. Help them to live in faith toward you in the communion of your holy Church and in loving service to each other that they may ever enjoy your heavenly blessing; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <265>

G Amen

C Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen

1. What is God asked to bestow in the marriage vow?
2. Look at each petition of the Lord's Prayer along with the Explanation in the *Small Catechism*. What does each petition teach you to pray for in your marriage?

The Introduction

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

The First Petition

Hallowed be Thy name.

What does this mean?

God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.

How is God's name kept holy?

God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

The Second Petition

Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean?

The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

How does God's kingdom come?

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

The Third Petition

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean?

The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is God's will done?

God's will is done when he breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

The Fourth Petition

Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean?

God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread?

Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

The Fifth Petition

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely

deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

The Sixth Petition

And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean?

God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

The Seventh Petition

But deliver us from evil.

What does this mean?


We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

The Conclusion

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.* Amen.

What does this mean?

This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen, means, "yes, yes, it shall be so."

 The eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant you his Holy Spirit, be with you, and richly bless you now and forever.

 Amen

3. The wedding service is just the beginning of your marriage. With His blessing, our Lord sends you forth to live in His name as husband and wife. Read John 15:1-12. How is your union with Christ in faith the source of life and blessing in your marriage?