

God's 5 Glorious Goals for Your Marriage

Are you happily married?

Happiness rises and falls, for all of us, married or not. And happiness isn't the real goal of life anyway.

Every day, I pray a prayer over my children that says, "God, help them to first be holy (set apart for You), and then to be healthy (physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially), and finally to be happy." I want all three for them, but I want them in the proper order.

So hoping to be married "happily ever after" will leave most people frustrated by unfulfilled expectations.

If you just read that and thought, "Man. The guy sounds pretty UNhappily married—" you'd be way wrong. I would just say it this way:

I've been married to the most awesome woman for nearly 20 years. In the seasons of our marriage where holiness has been my first priority, and when I've been healthy on multiple levels, our marriage has experienced joy that goes deeper than mere surface or self-fulfilling happiness. But in moments or seasons where holiness has slipped to some lower priority, when feeling the fun feelings of happiness has become my goal, or my god, or whatever, our happiness together has faded and struggled.

When Angie and I are mutually committed to being God's people for each other, our marriage soars.

Right now, I feel that we're stronger and more blessed than ever. But that's partly because we've been in the fight of our lives, recovering from the discovery of some very deep, real

sin and pain in each of us.

Selfishness always destroys because it's rooted in pride, works in the opposite manner of love, and can never be satisfied. But when we exemplify the very nature of the gospel (the self-sacrificing love by which Jesus went to the cross and laid Himself down for us to have and to hold us forever), then healing comes. And along with it, joy and happiness and fulfillment and intimacy and oneness and all the other things we know marriage ought to bring.

I'm a big believer that God is a God of purpose, and He has five purposes for every one of us. These are elaborated upon in Pastor Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, which has helped to lead a generation to an understanding that it isn't about me, or you.

It's about God.

It's about His plans and desires. And those five purposes are:

- He has planned us for His pleasure and wants everything about our lives to be worship.
- He has formed us for fellowship and desires that we develop deep relationships within His family.
- He has created us to be like Christ and gives us every spiritual resource necessary to pursue that goal.
- He has shaped us to serve Him, and we serve Him by serving others.
- He has made us for a mission and wants to use us to share the good news with everyone in the world.

God has these five purposes for your life as an individual believer. He also communicates these five purposes to the church, and every local church that focuses its work and ministry on fulfilling these five purposes in the world will be healthier for it.

And as I've devoted plenty of thought to it, these five

purposes wonderfully express God's design for marriage too.

God planned our marriage for His pleasure.

That is, the primary goal of the oneness that my wife and I develop is ultimately designed to reflect His glory to the world as we worship. This is why we grow when we pray together, sing together, attend worship services together, read or study together and talk about spiritual things together.

Our marriage is not simply a relationship in which we get to pursue our personal agendas of feeling good. Our marriage is an opportunity to glorify God and show the world what He's all about.

God formed our marriage for fellowship, with each other and with Himself.

I say at weddings that a strong marriage is really a marriage of three, not two, because God is always the invisible third member. That sounds pretty, but we forget it about six minutes after the bridal kiss. But it's true.

God wants spouses to be one, which means to intimately know and to intimately be known by each other. That's why secrets destroy marriages—not just the scandalous secret sins but the secrets of our hearts – our pain, our temptations, our inadequacies.

Few things are more important to a thriving marriage than honest, open, real, raw, heart-exposing conversation. And He desires for us, as a couple, to know Him intimately.

Intimacy is either nurtured by intentional pursuit or it is stagnating but it's never neutral.

Intimacy happens as we make time to be with each other, to talk to each other, to show physical affection and to enjoy physical intimacy with each other. God wants us closer to each

other and closer to Himself.

God created our marriage to make us more Christlike.

I am, by nature, a selfish dude. My wife has made an enormous dent in my selfishness. She challenges me to be God's man, to be more like Jesus, to root out sin, to keep praying, to stay in the Word and to love Jesus fully. And my responsibility is to present her to Jesus someday more mature, more Christlike.

That doesn't happen by controlling or bullying or dominating. It also doesn't happen accidentally or unintentionally. God's purpose for marriage is that we each look more like Jesus because of each other.

God shaped our marriage to serve Him by serving others.

One of the most difficult seasons of our marriage hit us when we moved from serving together to doing life a bit separately. Church was great. The weather was awesome. The opportunities to be adventurous and to experience a new place were wonderful. And the friends we made are lifetimers, especially within our small group.

But, we made a painful transition.

For 13 years, we had been the pastor and pastor's wife who put on Vacation Bible Schools, hosted families in our home and sat together at potlucks. We were always in the trenches together doing ministry alongside each other. Suddenly, I left early for the office to carry on my pastoral ministry while Angie served in ministry at home—homeschooling and changing lots of diapers.

Neither is more or less ministry, but we were doing ministry *separately* and differently than what we had previously experienced.

Since planting Grace Hills, we've relished the opportunities to get back to serving people beside each other while also

valuing our uniquely individual ministries as well. Angie uses her strengths to serve part-time on our staff while also running her own private counseling practice.

Few things will bring you closer as a couple than doing something together to serve other people.

God made our marriage for a mission.

Our marriage, itself, should show the world what it meant for Jesus to love the church like a bride, to lay down His own life for her ("church" comes from a feminine Greek word), and to redeem and wash and cleanse her for Himself.

So our love should be such that people see us and are taught something about God's love. And we should show each other the kind of grace that teaches people how God forgives. And we should see our marriage as an opportunity to witness to the world about Jesus together.

That means opening our home to the hurting, counseling couples and individuals together, and living on mission together.

I fell in love with Angie in high school. I wanted to be around her all the time. I couldn't wait to marry her. I loved starting a life with her, and I wouldn't trade any of those earliest memories together for anything in the world. I get the warm fuzzies thinking about it. But I also don't want to go back.

I'm loving the "now" with Angie, too. I'm grateful for all that we've discovered and are still discovering about what it means to be married, to glorify God together, to find community and oneness in each other, to serve others and share Jesus together.

And with all of the painful discoveries and difficult conversations we've had, I've never felt more blessed and gifted with a girl who makes my heart melt.

I'm thankful for the virtuous woman God has given to me to be my wife. Her price is far above rubies. And I'm even more thankful that He has clarified His purposes for our marriage. Now, I look forward to each new day of seeing those purposes fulfilled in us. {eoa}

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