

The Christian Home, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: God's Design for Marriage: Leaving, Cleaving, and One Flesh

Genesis 2:18–25; Matthew 19:4–6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson lays the foundation stone for the entire study, and a great deal is at stake doctrinally in these few verses. Genesis 2 and Matthew 19 together teach that marriage is not a human invention but a divine institution, established by God before the fall, before the Law, and before any human society had formed a single custom about it. God Himself designed it (“I will make him a helper fit for him”), defined it as the union of one man and one woman (“male and female”), and joined the couple together with His own authority (“what therefore God has joined together”). The teacher should be ready to state this clearly and without apology, because nearly every modern confusion about marriage begins by forgetting it. If marriage is merely a contract we devise, then we may redraw it as we please. If it is a design we received, then our task is not to redefine it but to honor it. Notice that Jesus settles the question of His day not by quoting the latest rabbi but by reaching back to the beginning, which tells us where the church must always go to understand the home.

Yet this lesson is not aimed only at the head. Genesis gives us the most tender picture of intimacy in all of Scripture: a God who notices that His creature is lonely, who fashions a companion with His own hands, and who walks her down the aisle to a man who breaks into poetry at the sight of her. The doctrine of marriage is wrapped in a love story, and that is no accident. The student you are teaching is not an abstraction. He or she carries a marriage that may be flourishing or fraying, or a longing for marriage, or a wound from a home that did not hold. The truth that God designed marriage is meant to land in those real lives as good news, the news that the home was God's idea before it was ever ours, and that He has not abandoned His design.

So aim at both targets. Send students home able to say clearly what God's design for marriage is and why it is not ours to renegotiate. And send them home with their hearts stirred to build the kind of home God had in mind in the garden, leaving what must be left, holding fast to the one God has joined them to, and growing toward the deep oneness that no ceremony creates in a day. The disciple we are forming is not merely someone who can defend a definition, but someone who is becoming, in their own household, a living echo of the goodness God spoke over the first marriage.

Question 1

Student Question:

God looks at the unfinished creation and says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). This is the first thing in all of creation God calls “not good.” What does this tell us about why God made marriage, and about the kind of need He designed it to meet?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the weight of the phrase land: “It is not good.” Six times in Genesis 1 God has surveyed His work and pronounced it good, and once, after the whole, “very good.” Now, for the first time, something is declared not good, and it is not sin (sin has not yet entered the world) but solitude. Adam is sinless, employed, and in unbroken fellowship with God, and still God says he lacks something. This tells us that the need for human companionship is not a result of the fall and not a weakness to be ashamed of. It is woven into us by the Creator. We were made for one another.

The word translated “helper” (Hebrew ezer) deserves a careful word, because in English “helper” can sound like an assistant or a subordinate. In Hebrew it carries no such overtone. The same word is used again and again of God Himself as the helper of His people (for example, “the Lord is my helper”). A helper in this sense is one who supplies what is lacking, who comes alongside in strength. The phrase “fit for him” (literally, corresponding to him, or suitable to him) pictures a counterpart who matches him, neither above nor below, like two halves that answer to one another.

Notice too that God designs the remedy before Adam ever voices the need. Adam does not come to God complaining of loneliness. God sees the lack and moves to fill it. This is the pattern of a good Father throughout Scripture, and it is a comfort to students who are weary of waiting on God in some area of their own lives.

Be careful here to honor singleness even as you exalt marriage. The lesson is that God made us for relationship and community, and marriage is the deepest ordinary form of that. It is not that an unmarried person is incomplete as a human being; Jesus Himself was single and perfectly whole. Lesson 10 will treat singleness directly. For now, the point is simply that companionship is God’s good design, and marriage is the first and central expression of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Marriage as instituted by God before the fall, part of His good creation
- The human need for companionship as designed, not as a defect
- The meaning of “helper” (ezer) as one who comes alongside in strength, used even of God
- “Fit for him” as a corresponding counterpart, teaching equality, not subordination
- God’s fatherly care in providing before the need is even spoken

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God called solitude “not good” even before sin entered the world?

- How does knowing “helper” is a word used of God Himself change how we hear it?
- Where do you see God meeting needs in your life before you even ask?

Question 2

Student Question:

Adam had meaningful work, a beautiful garden, and the very presence of God, and God still said he needed companionship. Where in your own life have you been trying to fill the place God made for human companionship with work, achievement, screens, or busyness instead? What would it look like this week to invest in the relationship God has actually given you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and its aim is not new information but honest reflection. Adam had everything a person might think would satisfy: purpose, a perfect environment, and the presence of God. Yet God built into him a capacity for human companionship that all of those good things could not fill. The modern temptation is to try to fill that God-shaped space for companionship with substitutes that ask less of us: a career that always answers, a screen that never argues, a calendar so full there is no room to feel the ache.

Help students see that the substitutes are usually not evil things. Work is good. Hobbies are good. Even solitude is good in season. The danger is not the thing itself but the way we let it crowd out the people God has actually placed in our lives. Many a marriage has grown cold not through some dramatic betrayal but through a slow, polite neglect, two people living parallel lives under one roof.

Press gently toward the concrete. The question asks for one specific investment this week. Resist letting the discussion stay at the level of general agreement that relationships matter. A husband might name an evening with the television off. A wife might name a real conversation rather than a logistical handoff. A single person might name reaching toward genuine friendship rather than retreating into isolation. The goal is a step small enough to take and real enough to matter.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between good activities and idols that crowd out people
- The slow drift of neglect as a real danger to a marriage
- Companionship as something that must be invested in, not assumed
- The lordship of Christ over how we spend our time and attention

Discussion Prompts

- What most often crowds out the people closest to you?
- What is one specific way you could invest in a key relationship this week?

- How do you tell the difference between a healthy interest and an escape?

Question 3

Student Question:

The woman is described as a “helper fit for him,” and she is formed from the man’s own side (Genesis 2:21–22). How do these details teach both the full equality and worth of the woman and the distinct, complementary way God designed husband and wife to fit together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question carries real doctrinal weight, because it touches the equal worth of woman and the complementary design of the sexes, themes the study will develop in Lessons 3 and 4. Handle both truths together; Scripture never lets us choose between them. The woman is fully equal to the man in worth, dignity, and bearing of the image of God (Genesis 1:27 had already declared that God made humanity “male and female” in His image). She is not a lesser creature or an afterthought.

The detail that she is formed from the man’s side has been treasured by Christians for centuries. An old and beautiful comment, often attributed to Matthew Henry, captures it: she was not taken from his head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be trampled by him, but from his side to be his equal, from under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved. Whether or not the wording is exact, the instinct is sound and worth sharing. The mode of her creation pictures partnership, not hierarchy of worth.

At the same time, the passage does teach distinction. The man is formed first and the woman is made as a helper corresponding to him; the New Testament will later draw on this order (1 Timothy 2:13) when it speaks of roles in the home and church. The teacher should hold this lightly here and firmly later. For this lesson, the point is that equality and distinction are not enemies. A key and a lock are equally valuable and not interchangeable. Husband and wife are of equal worth and are designed to fit together precisely because they are not identical.

Guard against two ditches as you teach. One ditch flattens the differences and insists the sexes are interchangeable; the other exaggerates the differences into a ranking of value, as though the man matters more. Genesis steers between them: two equal persons, wonderfully different, made for one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full equality and dignity of woman as image-bearer (Genesis 1:27)
- Creation from the man’s side as a picture of partnership, not subordination of worth
- Complementary design: equal in worth, distinct in role
- The error of erasing all distinction between the sexes
- The error of ranking the sexes in value or dignity

- Foundation laid here for the roles developed in Lessons 3 and 4

Discussion Prompts

- How would you explain that men and women are equal in worth yet not interchangeable?
- Where does our culture tend to flatten or to exaggerate the differences between the sexes?
- How does the way the woman was created speak against treating a spouse as either a ruler or a servant?

Question 4

Student Question:

Adam greeted his wife with delight: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). Whether you are married or single, where have you allowed criticism, comparison, or familiarity to replace that kind of delight in the people closest to you? Name one person you could begin to honor and cherish more deliberately.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The first human words ever recorded are not a complaint or a command but a cry of glad recognition: “This at last!” There is relief and delight in it, the joy of a man who has been searching the animals for a counterpart and found none until now. Marriage, and indeed every close relationship, is meant to be marked by that kind of glad valuing of the other.

The enemy of delight is rarely hatred; it is familiarity. We grow used to people. We begin to notice the flaws and overlook the gifts. Comparison creeps in, and we measure the person we have against some imagined ideal or against someone else’s spouse, friend, or family. Criticism becomes the background hum of the relationship. The wonder fades not in a day but by degrees.

This question is for the married and the single alike, which is intentional. Everyone has people God calls them to cherish, whether a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend, or a fellow Christian. Invite students to name one such person and one deliberate act of honor. Cherishing is a verb. It is spoken appreciation, remembered kindnesses, attention that says you matter to me. Encourage them to choose a step they can actually take before next week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Delight and glad valuing as God’s design for marriage and close relationships
- Familiarity, comparison, and criticism as the quiet killers of delight
- Cherishing as an active choice, not merely a feeling
- Honoring others as an expression of love commanded throughout the New Testament

Discussion Prompts

- When did you last express genuine delight in someone close to you?
- How does comparison erode our appreciation of the people we have?
- What is one concrete way you could honor someone this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Genesis says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother” (v. 24). In a world where Moses had not yet written and there were no in-laws to leave, why does Scripture begin its picture of marriage with leaving? What does godly “leaving” actually involve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Genesis 2:24 is striking when you remember the setting. Adam had no father and mother to leave; he was created directly by God. So this verse is not a comment on Adam’s situation but a principle the writer draws out for every marriage that would ever follow. The word “therefore” signals that what happened in the garden establishes a pattern: because God made marriage this way, here is how it works.

“Leaving” does not mean abandoning or dishonoring parents; the command to honor father and mother stands forever, and Lesson 9 will treat it directly. Leaving means a reordering of loyalties. A new household is formed, and it takes priority over the households each spouse came from. The primary human allegiance shifts from parent to spouse. Practically, this means parents no longer hold the deciding vote, the spouse is no longer expected to compete with in-laws for first place, and the couple builds a life that is genuinely their own under God.

It is worth noting that leaving is mentioned before holding fast and becoming one flesh. The order matters. You cannot fully cleave to your spouse while you are still clinging to something or someone else in the place your spouse should hold. Many marital conflicts trace back to a failure to leave, whether an over-attachment to parents, an old relationship never truly released, or a loyalty to friends or work that was never reordered.

Teachers in our setting should apply this with cultural sensitivity. In some families and cultures the pull of the extended family is very strong, and leaving can feel like betrayal. Help students see that honoring parents and leaving them to cleave to a spouse are not in conflict; God commands both, in their proper order.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genesis 2:24 as a normative principle for all marriages, not just Adam’s
- “Leaving” as a reordering of loyalty, not the dishonoring of parents
- The priority of the marriage bond over the family of origin
- The order of the verse: leaving precedes cleaving and oneness
- Failure to leave as a hidden root of marital conflict

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God place “leaving” first, before cleaving and oneness?
- How can a couple honor their parents and still genuinely leave them?
- Where do you see failures to “leave” causing trouble in marriages today?

Question 6

Student Question:

Every marriage has rivals for first place: parents, old friendships, careers, hobbies, even children. If you are married, what is the one thing you are most tempted to put ahead of your spouse? If you are not yet married, what loyalty might you need to be willing to reorder one day? What would real “leaving” require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the truth of leaving into the student’s own loyalties. Every marriage has rivals for first place, and they are usually not sinful in themselves, which is what makes them so easy to justify. Parents we love, friendships that predate the marriage, a demanding and rewarding career, the children who arrive and quietly displace the spouse, even a wholesome hobby can take the throne that belongs to the marriage under God.

The aim is honest naming. Ask students to identify the one rival they are most tempted to put ahead of their spouse. For some it will be a parent whose approval still governs them. For others it will be work, or a phone, or a child they have begun to parent at the expense of partnering. Naming the rival is the first step to dethroning it.

Include the single and engaged in the question. Those not yet married can begin now to think about which loyalties they would need to be willing to reorder, which is a far healthier preparation for marriage than the romantic fog that imagines no such reordering will ever be necessary. Reordering does not mean loving parents or friends less; it means loving the spouse first, in the place God assigns.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rivals to the marriage bond that are good in themselves yet wrongly placed
- The danger of children, work, or parents quietly displacing the spouse
- Honest self-examination as the first step toward reordering loyalties
- Preparation for marriage by single and engaged believers

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one rival most tempted to take first place in a marriage today?
- How can a couple put each other first without neglecting parents or children?

- If you are not married, what loyalty might you one day need to reorder?

Question 7

Student Question:

The man is to “hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (v. 24). Jesus quotes this and adds, “So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Matthew 19:6). The word behind “hold fast” means to be glued or cemented together. What does it mean for two people to become “one flesh,” and how is this far more than a physical union?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the lesson reaches its richest image: two people becoming “one flesh.” The verb behind “hold fast” (Hebrew *dabaq*) means to cling, to stick, to be joined. When Jesus quotes this in Matthew 19, the underlying idea (carried in the Greek *kollao*) is to glue or cement together. The picture is of a bond so strong that to break it is to tear, the way you cannot separate two boards that have been glued without splintering both.

“One flesh” certainly includes the physical union of husband and wife, and the passage is unembarrassed about that goodness (they were “naked and not ashamed”). But it means far more. It speaks of a comprehensive joining of two whole lives: bodies, yes, but also schedules, finances, families, dreams, sorrows, and futures. Two becomes one without either disappearing. It is the deepest human picture of unity in all of Scripture, which is exactly why the New Testament will use it to picture Christ and the church (Ephesians 5, the subject of Lesson 2).

Stress that oneness is created by God in the covenant but worked out over a lifetime. The wedding makes a couple one flesh in God’s sight in a moment; learning to live as one flesh is the labor of decades. This guards against two errors: the notion that the union is merely a feeling that can evaporate, and the notion that oneness arrives automatically without effort, forgiveness, and growth.

Finally, connect this to permanence, which the next question will develop. If God has glued two people into one flesh, then divorce is not a clean separation of two independent parties but a tearing of one living thing. That is why Jesus says, “let not man separate.” The strength of the bond is the reason for its permanence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Hold fast” (*dabaq*) and “cement together” (*kollao*) as images of an unbreakable bond
- “One flesh” as comprehensive union: body, life, and future, not merely physical
- The goodness and proper place of physical intimacy in marriage
- Oneness established by God in covenant yet worked out over a lifetime
- The strength of the one-flesh bond as the ground of marriage’s permanence

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of being “glued” together teach about the marriage bond?
- In what ways is “one flesh” far more than a physical union?
- Why does seeing marriage as one flesh make divorce a kind of tearing?

Question 8

Student Question:

Becoming one flesh is the work of a lifetime, not a single ceremony. In your closest relationship, where do you sense a fracture in that oneness right now, a place of distance, division, or unforgiveness? What is one concrete step toward repair you could take this week rather than waiting for the other person to move first?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the glorious truth of oneness toward the often painful reality of a particular relationship. Because oneness is built over time, every marriage develops fractures: areas of distance, recurring conflict, old wounds left unhealed, forgiveness withheld. The goal here is not to shame anyone but to invite honest acknowledgment and one concrete movement toward repair.

Notice the wording of the question: a step the student can take rather than waiting for the other person to move first. This is deliberate and deeply Christian. The gospel teaches us to take initiative in reconciliation rather than holding out for the other to apologize. We love because He first loved us. A spouse who waits for the other to move first may wait forever; a spouse who moves first reflects Christ.

Help students choose something specific and within their power: an apology owed, a hard conversation begun gently, a habit of criticism laid down, a long-withheld forgiveness finally extended. Caution them against using this moment to rehearse the other person’s faults. The question asks what they can do. Where a fracture involves serious harm or ongoing sin, the teacher should be ready to point quietly toward the elders or other wise help; not every fracture is repaired by a single private step, and Lessons 5 and 10 will deal with harder situations with care.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Oneness as a lifelong project that inevitably develops fractures
- Taking initiative in reconciliation as an imitation of Christ
- The difference between naming one’s own step and rehearsing another’s faults
- Awareness that serious or sinful fractures may need wise outside help

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so hard to be the one who moves first toward repair?
- What is one concrete step toward oneness you could take this week?
- How does the gospel free us to seek reconciliation without keeping score?

Question 9

Student Question:

When the Pharisees came testing Him about divorce, Jesus did not argue from culture or convenience. He reached back to creation: “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,” and “what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4–6). What does Jesus’ appeal to the beginning teach us about God’s unchanging design for marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, and why does it matter that it is God, not the couple, who does the joining?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and the teacher should handle it with both confidence and care. The Pharisees come “to test him,” asking whether it is lawful to divorce one’s wife “for any cause.” It was a live controversy in their day, with some rabbis allowing divorce for almost any reason. Jesus refuses to be drawn into the contemporary debate on its own terms. Instead He lifts the whole question back to its foundation: “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female ...?”

Three truths stand out, and each is clear and non-negotiable for those who take Scripture seriously. First, marriage is the union of male and female by God’s deliberate design (“made them male and female”). Jesus grounds the definition of marriage in the way God created humanity, not in shifting human custom. Second, marriage is meant to be the lifelong joining of one man and one woman; the singular “his wife” and the “two” who become “one flesh” exclude both polygamy and the casual dissolving of the bond. Third, it is God who joins: “what therefore God has joined together.” The couple does not merely join themselves; God acts in the covenant. That is precisely why no human being has the authority to tear it apart at will.

Draw out the significance of Jesus appealing to “the beginning.” When the culture of His day pressed for a looser view, Jesus did not negotiate; He returned to creation. This gives the church its enduring method: on marriage and the home, we go back to God’s design rather than forward to the latest consensus. The teacher can state plainly, in a measured and non-inflammatory way, that this is the settled biblical conviction underlying the whole study, namely that marriage is the lifelong, one-flesh union of one man and one woman, established by God.

Be ready for the natural next question about divorce, but do not rush ahead. Jesus does go on in Matthew 19:7–9 to address divorce and the so-called exception, and the Pharisees press Him on what Moses permitted. That harder ground is the proper subject of Lesson 5, where it can be handled fully and tenderly. For this lesson, keep the focus where Jesus puts it first: on the

design, on what God has joined. Establish the foundation clearly here, and the harder cases will have a place to stand later.

Pastorally, remember that some in the room carry the weight of a broken marriage. The point of this question is not to wound them but to lift up the beauty and authority of God's design. God's hatred of divorce (Malachi 2, again in Lesson 5) flows from His love for people and what divorce does to them; He does not despise the divorced. Teach the design with conviction and the people with gentleness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Marriage defined by God's creation of humanity as "male and female"
- Marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman; polygamy excluded
- God, not the couple alone, as the one who joins husband and wife
- Jesus' method: returning to "the beginning" rather than to current custom
- The settled biblical conviction of the study, stated in a measured way
- Pastoral care for those carrying the weight of a broken marriage
- Divorce and the exception reserved for fuller treatment in Lesson 5

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus answer a question about divorce by pointing back to creation?
- What changes when we remember it is God who joins a husband and wife?
- How can we hold God's design firmly while remaining tender toward the hurting?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, the garden where God designed marriage and the moment Jesus defended it. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about God's design for the home that you most need to carry into your own marriage, family, or future this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward formation. Students have walked from the garden, where God designed marriage and called the man's solitude "not good," to the hillside, where Jesus defended that design against every attempt to redraw it. Now they are asked to name one specific way Jesus is forming them through these verses.

Resist letting the answers stay general ("I just need to love my family more"). Press gently for the specific and the personal. One student may sense a call to truly leave a parent's controlling influence. Another may need to stop neglecting a spouse for work. A single believer may be freed from the lie that they are incomplete until married. Another may need to begin the slow

work of repairing a fractured oneness. The truth has many doors, and the Spirit will press different ones for different people.

Close by lifting the students' eyes to the largeness of what they have seen: the home was God's idea before it was ever ours. To build a Christian home is not to follow a set of rules but to take up an invitation from the One who first said it is not good to be alone, who fashions companions, who joins husband and wife, and who has never abandoned His good design. Send them out not merely informed about marriage but stirred to honor, in their own households, the design of the God who made it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of God's design (Genesis 2) and Jesus' defense of it (Matthew 19)
- Formation as specific and personal, not vague resolve
- The home as God's invitation, not merely a set of rules
- Marriage and the home as part of God's good and unchanging design

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth from these passages do you most need to carry this week?
- Where is Jesus specifically forming you as a spouse, parent, child, or single believer?
- How does it change things to remember the home was God's idea before it was ours?