

Book Review: Married For God

Married For God: Making your marriage the best it can be Christopher Ash. IVP 2007

Last year I read a book called *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* by Christopher Ash. I loved it. It challenged me and helped me rethink my model of marriage. I wished that everybody could read it, but because it is described as a serious, scholarly and thorough Biblical and theological study (of some 400 pages) intended for ministers and theological students, I realized that it might be a bit unrealistic. So imagine my delight at seeing Ash's new book (much smaller at 174 pages) at the bookshop this year. *Married For God* is the scaled-down version of his earlier book, designed for a general Christian readership.

Ash's central thesis is that we ought to take our fundamental soundings as to the purpose of marriage from God, not from our own needs, hopes and desires. Marriage is not human-centred, it is God-centred.

This book is not a 'how to' or even a 'what is' book on marriage; it is a 'why' book. It's the 'why' question which should always be asked first. Not only this, but Ash urges us to ask God's 'why' question rather than ours, because the answer turns out to be quite different. We need "to change our minds, consciously to turn from what we want – from our hopes for marriage – and to seek his will and goals for marriage" (p17). But what does God want for marriage? Why did God choose to create humankind male and female? Why did he create us with the mysterious chemistry of sexual desire and delight?

These are the questions at the centre of this book. And they are great questions because they help us to seriously engage with the Bible's teaching on marriage.

Ash demonstrates his pastoral heart by beginning with a word about the emotional and sexual baggage we often bring into our marriages. He makes it quite plain that God's grace, forgiveness and restoration are freely available to those with spoiled sexual pasts. Chapter 2, entitled *Married For a Purpose*, is the key chapter to the book. In it he examines the Genesis passages and fashions his motto for the book: sex in the service of God. He says the motto is to remind us that "the whole business of marriage in all its fullness is to be lived in the loving joyful service of God, as we look outwards from our marriages and as couples to seek to care for God's world together"

(p33). Here he addresses issues like: why marriage is not the answer to loneliness; why 'inward-looking' marriage is not real love; and hints at the importance of children.

The following chapters expand on themes that flow out of this purpose for marriage: namely the purpose of having children; the purpose of sex and intimacy; and even the very purpose of the marriage institution. His answers are thoroughly grounded in Scripture and contribute to some wonderfully fresh insights. But the book remains firmly earthed in the twenty-first century world where heartbreak, divorce, sexual chaos and childlessness are distressingly common. He touches on issues such as singleness, the choice not to have children, contraception, cohabitation and adultery.

Chapter 5, God's Pattern for the Marriage Relationship, is a great re-statement of the beautiful pattern we find in Scripture of the loving, sacrificial headship of a husband and the joyful, voluntary submission of a wife. He moves carefully through each of the major 'marriage' passages (Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1Peter 3), pointing to the shape of marriage given to us by God. Of particular help is his designation of the distortions of God's pattern of marriage: the tyrannical husband; the bossy wife; the mousy wife; and the abdicator husband.

Ash's concluding chapter is called The Greatest Invitation. It puts the entire Bible's teaching on marriage into a proper long-view perspective where all human beings are invited to be blissfully married in the marriage to beat all marriages! This is "the story of God the Lover, the Bridegroom, the Husband, and his people his Beloved, His Bride, and in the end his Wife" (p166). And it is this story which persuades us to look beyond the frustrations and conflicts of human marriage and the pains of singleness to the great wedding day when God will be with us forever.

This is a book that will challenge you, refresh you and stimulate you. It will lift your eyes from the humdrum of day-by-day married life to see the great purpose that God has for husbands and wives.

So, now everyone **can** read it, and you should. You will be richly rewarded.

Currently available from Moore Books (02 95779966) for \$19.95