Marriage is a sacred institution originated by God. According to Scripture, it is a covenant relationship which establishes a bond between a man and a woman that is dissolved only when death causes the inevitable separation.¹

God's design for marriage goes back to man's beginning. The first chapters of Genesis relate how God spoke the firmament into existence, and created water, dry land, vegetation, and every living creature. Then He created man. Although God deemed everything that He had made “very good,” He proceeded to identify something that was not good: “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). To address man’s need for a suitable companion, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. Then He took one of Adam’s ribs, and from it “made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Genesis 2:22).

It is significant that in Genesis 2:23, the woman made from Adam’s rib was referred to as “woman.” In verse 25, she is referred to as Adam’s “wife.” Something had happened—God had instituted marriage! God had made the two as one. And He immediately gave the first Scriptural directive regarding this union: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Thus, according to God’s decree, the marriage union transcends even the bond between parent and child.

Scripture gives several guidelines regarding who a person should marry. First, it is clear that marriage is to be between a man and a woman. Woman was specifically created by God to be a “help meet for him [man]” (Genesis 2:18, 20). The literal meaning of this phrase is “a helper corresponding to man”—one who was equal and adequate for him. She was perfectly and uniquely formed to complement man physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Although marriage, both Scripturally and traditionally, has been defined as the union of a man and woman as husband and wife, some are trying to revise that definition to say that marriage is the legal union of two individuals, irrespective of gender. However, the Bible is clear that a physical relationship between two men or two women is an abomination. Leviticus 18:22 says, “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.” Society may look at a same-sex union as an “alternative lifestyle” or simply a matter of choice, but such relationships are clearly condemned by God.²

Another basic guideline regarding the choice of a marriage partner is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, which reads, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” Those who are saved need to seek another believer as a marriage companion. That person needs to be more than just religious; the two need to be one in faith and doctrine.

Utmost care must be taken in choosing a marriage partner, for God’s Word teaches that marriage is to be an exclusive relationship—a lifelong, faithful union with one’s spouse. Mark 10:9 reads, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”
Divorce was never part of God's plan, because He intended marriage to be between one woman and one man, for life.

While the law of the land may allow for the dissolution of a marriage, in God's eyes that marriage exists until one of the marriage partners dies.

Divorce was never part of God's plan, because He intended marriage to be between one woman and one man, for life. The Prophet Malachi rebuked Jewish men for divorcing their wives, warning them, “Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth,” and then continuing, “For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away [divorce]” (Malachi 2:15-16).

Under the Law of Moses, divorce was tolerated under certain conditions because of the hardness of the hearts of the people. When the Pharisees of Jesus’ day questioned Him about this, He responded, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). Jesus was restating that the divine intention for the covenant of marriage did not include dissolution of that sacred bond.

Jesus did provide one allowance for “putting away” of a wife. This is described in Matthew 19:9, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” This verse refers to the Jewish law concerning the vow of espousal. Under that law, the espousal was as binding as the marriage vow. The couple met to make the espousal agreement, but once
the arrangement had been made, the two individuals
did not come together for about a year, allowing each
of them time to prepare for the marriage. When that
period was up, they came together and the marriage
was consummated. If, during that espousal period, one
broke the agreement by having a sexual union with
another person, that was fornication. Under Jewish
law, that was grounds for the marriage agreement to
dissolve.

Joseph is an example of this. In Matthew 1:18-19, we
read, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:
When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph,
before they came together, she was found with child of
the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just
man, and not willing to make her a publick example,
was minded to put her away privily.” Joseph knew he
had not had physical relations with Mary, and yet she
was found to be with child. All the evidence seemed to
indicate that she had been unfaithful, but the angel of
the Lord came and reassured him. Otherwise, he could
have obtained a bill of divorcement and put her away
because, in a normal situation, her pregnancy would
have been proof of an act of fornication.

When a believer is married to an unbeliever, the
saved individual is not given license to divorce the
unsaved. The Bible says, “If any brother hath a wife
that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with
him, let him not put her away. And the woman which
hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be
pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him”
(1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

Paul goes on to say, “If the unbelieving depart, let
him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage
in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what
knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy hus-
band? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt
save thy wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:15-16). The faithfulness
of a Christian spouse could cause the unsaved individ-
ual to turn to God.

Some teach that the phrase “not in bondage” in
verse 15 means the believer is free to marry again.
However, the Greek word douloo, translated “bondage”
in this verse, is not the same word used in verse 39
where Paul says, “The wife is bound [deo] by the law
as long as her husband liveth.” Paul was simply stating
that if the unbelieving partner insisted on departing,
the believing spouse would not come under any con-
demnation for the fact that the unbelieving spouse
abandoned the marriage.

At times, a Christian’s marriage may end in divorce,
in spite of his or her attempts to avoid that outcome.
However, even when a believer has been abandoned
and divorced by an unfaithful spouse, Scripture makes
no allowance for remarriage while the first companion
lives. There is still potential for the departed spouse
to repent and desire to return to the marriage vow
that was made before God, but if the believing spouse
remarries, that restoration would not be possible. God
blesses and strengthens the one who purposes to live
according to His instructions, and helps him or her to
continue to live a victorious life as a divorcee.

Romans 7:2-3 reinforce the prohibition against
remarriage while the companion lives: “For the
woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to
her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband
be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.
So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married
to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.” In
Luke 16:18, we find the same instruction given con-
cerning the man. “Whosoever putteth away his wife,
and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and who-
soever marrieth her that is put away from her husband
shall be called an adulterer.” Both the man who separated
from his wife and married someone else, and the man
who married the wife of another man are living in the
state of adultery. Even though such a union may be
legal according to the laws of land, is not right when
measured by Scripture.

If individuals find themselves in a marriage
situation that is inconsistent with what the Bible
prescribes, they should start by giving their hearts
and the situation to God. He has a marvelous way of
untangling “impossible” conditions and providing a
clear path for complying with His will.

God’s plan for this most intimate of human rela-
tionships is a good one. As husbands and wives apply
Biblical principles in building their marriages and
keeping God first, He will be glorified and His divine
purpose for this sacred union will be exemplified to
the world.

1 See Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:5-9.
2 See Genesis 19:1-13; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27;
1 Corinthians 6:9.