

# Marriage Week 2021 – “Naked Marriage” – Companionship

## Introduction

So, “naked marriage” – that’s the title of this year’s Marriage Week. What to say about “naked marriage”?!

Well, it might lead us to think about the story of Adam & Eve – who were, of course, happily naked, before everything went pear-shaped (or rather, “fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”-shaped)

And this, then, might lead us to remember God’s words after creating Adam, “*It is not good for the man to be alone.*” (Genesis 2:18a, NIV)

(Incidentally, this shows that whatever some may say, God alone is *not* enough for us – we need others of our own kind – other humans, other people – we need each other.)

But to return to the story. “*It is not good for the man to be alone,*” says God, “*I will make a helper suitable for him.*” (Genesis 2:18a, NIV)

Or as the Message version puts it, “*I’ll make him a helper, a companion.*” (Genesis 2:18b, MSG)

And that is perhaps the essence of marriage – its key component: *companionship*.

## Important note

Now, this is a talk for Marriage Week, and so inevitably its focus will be on companionship within marriages and similar long-term relationships.

But, if you are not in such a relationship, please don’t think that this talk is not for you – and please, especially, don’t take from it *any* suggestion that the companionship of other relationships is somehow “inferior” or lesser in any way.

A friendship can be even longer lasting and just as deep as the best of marriages.

And our partners – significant as they are – are very far from the only important companions we have throughout our lives.

Yes, the life-time commitment of marriage does allow for a particularly close companionship to develop (although there’s certainly no guarantee that this will happen).

But please know that the companionship of other relationships can be just as deep, and just as significant, and just as valuable – and that much of what follows is equally applicable to all.

## Companionship

One dictionary definition of a *companion* is “*a person with whom one spends a lot of time or with whom one travels.*”

Companionship grows out of time spent together.

This might be stating the obvious, but it is very easy to allow the busyness of life to encroach upon times of togetherness, and for couples to become the proverbial “ships that pass in the night”.

There is, of course, much more to marriage than together-time – but without this, it is very difficult even to sustain a meaningful relationship – let alone develop and deepen it.

Most divorces happen, not because of some serious disagreement or insurmountable differences, but simply because the couples have drifted apart.

We need make and set aside and guard as precious and important, time to be together, time to draw closer, time to deepen intimacy.

So, *companionship* involves time spent together – but also time travelling together.

A *companion* is a person “*with whom one travels.*”

This speaks of journeying through the world, but also of journeying through life – especially in the context of the lifetime commitment of marriage – two people pledged to be there with each other and for each other, in all they encounter along the way.

There to be one another’s aide, ally, friend, guide, playmate and protector.

And *companion* has another sense – that of “*things intended to complement or match each other*” – such as a “companion piece” in art or music.

What a lovely thought – that in a healthy relationship, far from losing their identify, each partner is enhanced by the other.

Becoming, individually, ever closer to their true identify – and together, more that they could be on their own.

## “Two are better than one...”

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes expresses this well:

*Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labour:  
If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.  
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.  
But how can one keep warm alone?  
Though one may be overpowered,  
two can defend themselves.* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NIV)

Now, he is not, of course, talking specifically about marriage – but rather about the essential truth that we all need each other.

As John Donne so famously wrote, “*No man [no person] is an island entire of itself; every man [each of us] is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...*”

Or, as the multi-talented Richard Ayoade puts in a recent series of ads for HSBC – “*we are not an island – we are part of something far, far bigger.*”

In other words, we are not independent, but *inter*-dependent and interconnected.

“*Two are better than one...*” says the Teacher, because we can *help* each other and *support* each other and *care* for each other and *protect* each other...

We can all of us *be* so much more, and *do* so much more, together than apart.

This applies to us as groups, communities, nations – to the whole human race.

And we see this universal truth at work in all our varied interactions with others – particularly in our closest relationships, with our family and our friends...

And perhaps most especially – for those with long-term partners – in our relationship with the person with whom we’ve chosen to share our life.

## Friction & Forgiveness

*[Note: This section is something of an aside and could be omitted without impacting the main message and flow of the talk.]*

But, before we go on, we perhaps need to recognise that as well as all the positives, there are also costs that come with closeness and companionship – one of which is conflict.

Generally speaking, the closer we are to someone, the more likely it is that conflict will arise.

It's more likely that you'll fall out with your immediate neighbours than with someone on the other side of town.

And more likely that you'll fall out with your partner than with your neighbour.

Indeed, the only way to avoid conflict altogether would be to cut yourself off from the world entirely!

The closer we are to someone, the more likely it is that, at times, we're going to “rub them up the wrong way”.

This “emotional friction” between two people is very like the physical friction between two objects.

It's the result of our differences and especially our inevitable “rough edges” – and the closer we become, the more these rough edges are liable to catch and chafe each other.

Hence, the need for true love, as elucidated so beautifully by Paul in his famous words from 1 Corinthians 13, read so often at weddings.

Love that is so much more than a warm feeling, but rather shows itself in practical, generous, sacrificial action:

Patient and kind. Not envious or boastful or proud. Not dishonouring or self-seeking. Not easily angered or keeping a record of wrongs. Always protecting. Always trusting. Always hoping. Always persevering.

## Breaking bread

But back to *companionship*.

The origin of words is often very illuminating:

The word *companion* comes from the Latin prefix *com*, meaning “together with” and *panis*, meaning “bread”. So, literally, a *companion* is “one who breaks bread with another.”

It’s someone with whom we share our meal, our table, our home, our lives.

For many of us, this will immediately call to mind the Last Supper, when – on the evening before his arrest – Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples:

*“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”* (Luke 22:19, NIV)

Jesus broke bread with his disciples, his friends, his companions – and then he gave his body broken for us all.

So, when we say that *companionship* is about breaking bread together, it is more than simply sharing food – precious as that is – it is the sharing of our very selves.

This is true of all companionship, but most especially in the companionship of marriage. As the couple says during the Church of England marriage service:

*“With my body I honour you/ all that I am I give to you/ and all that I have I share with you/ within the love of God/ Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”*

All that I am – all that I have – body and soul.

And it is a giving of ourselves in which – like Jesus – we are prepared to be broken.

Not to compare ourselves with Jesus, of course.

And not saying that “brokenness” is something we should welcome or desire.

And certainly not endorsing a brokenness that leaves us diminished and devalued.

No, nothing more or less than the vulnerability that comes from truly loving, and from giving yourself to another in love.

For better, for worse...

But it's hard, isn't it?

It's hard to be that vulnerable.

Hard to risk being broken by love.

As Bob Parr – “Mr Incredible” – says to his wife Helen – “Elastigirl” – in the film “The Incredibles”: *“I can't... I'm not... strong enough.”*

It's a universal and completely understandable fear. When the crunch comes, will we strong enough, or will we be found wanting?

Every marriage – every life – will have its joys and sorrows, harmony and discord, pleasures and pain.

And in many marriages, this is recognised right at the very start, right in the midst of the celebration of this new unit being formed, this new adventure just beginning:

*“For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish; till death us do part...”*

Right there, is that commitment to stay the course, to stay together, to remain companions throughout the journey, whatever hardships might be encountered along the way.

Always there, to *help* each other and *support* each other and *care* for each other and *protect* each other...

Encouragingly, the testimony of others seems to be that when such moments do come, we can discover a strength we never knew we had.

Not to pretend that it's easy... Or that some don't find it all too much... But ultimately, most do seem to find a way through the brokenness and pain.

### The third companion

That passage from Ecclesiastes doesn't end where we left it. There is a wonderful coda:

*“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:12, NIV)

Yes, “two are better than one” – but “a chord of three strands” is stronger still.

And many would see and understand that third strand as God.

Always with us, and within all our relationships – woven throughout our lives.

As Paul wrote to the Colossians:

*“He [Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* (Colossians 1:17, NIV)

He is the “third strand” who strengthens all our relationships, holding them together – and, when things do “break”, holding us together – entwined in his Love.

This is our God, our constant companion.

The One who “breaks bread” with us and was broken for us.

Who shares his Life with us and gives all life to us.

Let us recognise his presence, and walk as his companions, and share our lives with him.