

12/29/24 - Romans 11:33-36 - "Designed for Glory: Marriage, Children and Singleness"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 0 0] the scripture for today. We are studying Romans chapter 11, right at the very end of Romans chapter 11, verses 33 through 36. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord and who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever. Amen.

But as we're coming to a close, I think I love the end of the year. I love beginning a new year, not just because you set new resolutions that you break the next day or kind of just romanticize what a new year might look like as opposed to what the year has been.

Sometimes you let yourself down because you set your expectations so high. But in the cards for you, God has planned to bring you through more trials, more hardships.

And so it's not for any of those reasons that I look forward to the end of the year or the beginning of a new year. I think it's important for us to look back as we do in prayer. I think it's very important to look forward, to set some goals according to the Bible and how we might be able to look at things that we can get better in for this upcoming year. And so as we step into a new year very soon, what better time to strengthen our foundation by anchoring ourselves in the timeless truths of God's Word, especially regarding our relationships and our roles in this life.

Still Valley Church is a diverse community of 88 total member and covenant partners, individual.

[2 : 1 7] 16 of them are single and we got about 35 married couples. Some are engaged, some are divorced, some are remarried, some are widowed, some are childless. Many are parents with 42 kids and everything in between. Very diverse. Now, each of these situations is not just a chapter in our lives, but an opportunity to magnify God. And yes, in every one of those places. And the question isn't of where we are, if we're in any of those, we know that all of those areas are where we're at.

But the question is, how can we glorify God where we're at? Yet as a culture, we often find this distortion that diminishes God's good design. And the challenge is real. It's everywhere.

The secular world promotes ideas like marriage is for just anyone. If you love each other, just get married. Or for everyone. Man and man, woman and woman, or whatever exists out there. It's all detached from God's covenantal purpose of marriage. It's promoted in the ideas like parenthood is optional, even within a marriage, and often viewed as a burden, right? Or even exalting singleness as a form of independence and self-fulfillment above all else. Now, these distortions are fueled by deeper cultural currents. Carrying these ideas is a deeper current that is deeper than what meets what your eye can perceive. It's relativism, subjectivism, pulling that downstream, which deny absolute truth and undermine the family as God's foundational institution for society.

It's the current of cultural deconstruction which challenges the God-given roles of men and women and eroding the beauty of their unique contribution, especially within the family.

It's the current of idolatry of career and materialism which prioritizes personal ambitions over relationships. But church, when God's design is at stake, so is His glory.

[5 : 02] If we lose sight of the sacred nature of family life, of what it means to have children and even singleness, we risk compromising the very purpose of which He created us. And 2025 has nothing to glorify God in, where we're at, if we are a diverse community. So instead, Scripture calls us to live in tension with the ideals of the world and a friction that reveals the beauty of God's design in every stage and season of life. And just as Colossians tells us that when we were once sinners, we were transferred out of darkness and into light. Everyone who calls upon the name of Jesus Christ by their faith are ushered into this newness of life. The old is gone and the new has come. Sins are separated as far as the east is from the west, all upon a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And with that comes a lot of tension because the world, as popular as ideas are, are headed that way. And here come the Christians, as few as we are, are headed that way. And we feel that tension, don't we? So as we prepare for the new year, let's commit to embracing and celebrating God's plan for our families, for our children, and for our singleness. Not as burdens or societal expectations, but as sacred callings to glorify God this upcoming year. Let's begin 2025 with a clear trajectory to live every relationship, every role, and every season to the glory of God. Amen? You guys awake today? Amen. Gene's awake, so I know everyone's awake. I don't know what that's supposed to mean, but I'll figure it out later.

The sermon title today is Designed for Glory, Living Out God's Plan in Every Season. And by looking at Paul's charge and his concluding remarks there in Romans, we're going to see Romans coming to life by the end of our time. And we'll see a main point be reinforced, that submitting to what God's Word defines, brings Him glory through His design. And so let's begin by looking at some of these areas. And I'd like to begin firstly in prayer. So join me in prayer.

Father, thank You for assembling us that we don't all look alike. We aren't in the same areas of life.

We're not in the same roles in life. We're not in the same season. And it's for Your glory that we aren't. And Father, Your Word has a lot to say about how we can look at areas of improvements this upcoming year and how to be challenged by Your Word. And so I ask for You to set those clear guidelines for us according to what Your Word says. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

And so looking at God's design for marriage, and this is part of the language in our statement of faith.

[8 : 40] I assume everyone who's here today has probably looked at the statement of faith first before you came. But you shouldn't find this as a surprise, because all of this is in there. And so we see at this time our statement of faith talking about the design for marriage. And we look to Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5. And now for the sake of time, I want us to see big pictures here. I want us to see the constructs of being what's communicated here. And we see that in Genesis 2, from 15 all the way to 25, that the Lord God placed man in the Eden to work and to care for it, granting him freedom to eat from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and warning that eating from it would bring death. In Genesis 2, 15 and 17. Now observing man's solitude, God declared that it was not good for him to be alone and resolved to make a suitable helper for him in verse 18. And though man named all the animals, none were found as a fit helper in verse 19 and 20. So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, fashioned it into a woman, presenting her to him in verse 21 and 22.

And Adam exclaimed, this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man in verse 23. And thus marriage was established.

A man leaves his parents and is united to his wife and they become one flesh in verse 24. And in their original state, they were naked yet felt no shame in verse 25.

Let's flip over to the New Testament in Ephesians 5, starting in 22 and going all the way to 33. This portrays marriage as a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church.

It instructs wives are called to submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, recognizing the husband's role as the head, just as Christ is the head of the church.

[11 : 13] In verse 22 and 24, husbands are commanded to love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, demonstrating sacrificial love that seeks to sanctify and cherish her in verse 25 and through 29. And so this mirrors Christ's care for the church, presenting her in splendor without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish in verse 26 and 27. And so marriage is rooted in this Genesis principle here. A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh in verse 31. This profound mystery, as Paul puts it, points to Christ's union with the church, calling husbands to love their wives as themselves and wives to respect their husbands in verse 32 through 33.

Church, this is the theology of marriage. This is understanding God's good design. And if we live out his design, God is glorified according to his design. Marriage is a lifetime covenant between one man and one woman. There's nothing to argue about.

And it reflects Christ's relationship with the church in Ephesians 5. It reflects that sacrificial love that Jesus carried the cross to Calvary for, that gave himself up for. This is the image of marriage, and it's profoundly rooted in the gospel and the good news of Jesus. And the roles within marriage are distinct, aren't they? There's not much argument there. Husbands are to reveal sacrificial love and leadership just as Jesus Christ did, right? And wives reveal submission to their husbands, respectful partnership, just as Jesus Christ did. This is his design. And the purpose of marriage is a ministry that demonstrates the gospel to the world. It provides the foundation for raising godly children and the context for sexual intimacy by uniting two flesh into one. It's a beautiful picture.

But as we all know, we don't always get things right, right? We have a sinful world. We have sinful paths paths in our lives that often haunt us, decisions that were made and all sorts of things. And we see this trickle into marriages with husbands failing miserably at this, where there's a sinful condition of husbands causing a distortion of Christ-like leadership in the house, prioritizing personal desires and spiritual neglect of their wives and kids. It's all about them. And it transpires in domination, sometimes in abuse, or just passivity, where they just pull away completely and they don't care.

And it runs counter to what's in Ephesians 5. The sinful condition also impacts wives as well, causes a resistance to submission as if submission were a negative thing all of a sudden, because the culture says it is, and that you're weak if you submit. Or they struggle with it by idolizing this independence, like nobody's going to tell me. Like Friedman and the 60s feminists rose up against strong male leadership and said, no man's going to tell us what to do. And marriage is like a concentration camp for abuse. This is the ideology in the 60s. God predicted it all. He said it all in Genesis 3. He said, your desire shall be for your husband. Not that you're going to be attracted to him.

[15 : 39] Your desire is to be like your husband. Your desire will be for your husband. Do you understand that? It's meaning that your struggle is going to be trying to control, trying to usurp.

We fail on both sides of the spectrum. And because of these struggles, this covenant relationship that was intended to last a lifetime, according to Genesis 2.24, often ends in divorce, which God graciously designs and exits in the two cases of sexual immorality and spousal abandonment.

And these two gracious exits are those contexts for when sin creates physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. Even neglect by husbands or wives using porn and completely distorting the intimacy between a husband and a wife. And we kind of think of church discipline, don't you?

When you're thinking about God's design for the local church, you think of church discipline, and sometimes the final step being excommunication. But the purpose of church discipline is to preserve the image of the gospel and the declaration, the proclamation of the gospel, the sanctity of the gospel.

Well, so too, divorce is intended to do the same. Divorce is never God's ideal, right? Never intended for divorce. It's clear. But His grace provides protection in situations of harm or unfaithfulness.

[17 : 24] Each situation is unique, and we must understand that with divorce. There's not a one-size-fits-all. We've got complicated situations, even within our own church body. So it's not a one-size-fits-all.

It's complicated. It's unique. And God's wisdom and care guide us through these painful realities. But you see, God constructed both, the beautiful union and the protective out. And the protective out because of the power of sin that it has on people to protect them, each of which, within their own context, truly glorifies God when done according to what His Word says. Isn't this amazing? To see those contexts lived out according to His Word. And so might 2025 be a year where our marriages are worked on, husbands and wives. Look at that. How is your marriage a ministry to the world, right? How is your marriage serving as a foundation for raising up the next generation of disciple-making disciples? How is your marriage the only means of which sexual intimacy is acted out upon? It's hard, but it's worth it because God's glory is at stake. And those who are divorced, divorced, it's not a time to live in shame or regret like you're missing out on something. But you are right within God's plan because God designed divorce to preserve the image and the sanctity of marriage and to protect you from harm. This is the good news. You are right where God has you to be today.

We also think about children as another aspect. We see in the second section, God's design for children. It makes us think of Psalm 127, Deuteronomy 6. And so looking at Scripture and teasing out some of Scripture's commands and theology, the Bible affirms first and foremost that children are a precious gift from the Lord entrusted to parents for His purposes. And so a husband and a wife are to guide their children in righteousness, to lead them. Sometimes that means you're not their best friend, and that's okay. You're their parent, right? You lead them. You walk with them according to God's commands. As Proverbs 22, 6 says, train up a child in the way that he should go. Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. And now this is obviously wisdom. This is not a promise. This isn't pragmatism that this is how you produce a Christ follower. We all know that our kids are not guaranteed to grow up to be Christians. My own kids aren't guaranteed to grow up to be Christians.

My goal is to show them the pathway, right? It's a hard reality, but it is a responsibility of husbands and wives. So how do you grow them up? How do you lead them? Through God's Word. Deuteronomy 6, 6 through 7. These commands that I give are today to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the roads and when you lie down and when you get up. You kind of sense the emphasis in that Deuteronomy passage. Like literally anything you're doing, like talk to them about God. Everything. Simple stuff. And husbands and wives are to discipline in love and wisdom. Proverbs 13, 24 talks about the rod of discipline. Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.

[21 : 50] And even going to the New Testament, Ephesians 6, 4, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Along with those, there's many other imperatives in Scripture, like to pray for your children, to instill a hard work ethic within your children, to show them and model it in Proverbs 6, or fostering their God-given purpose and ultimately raising them for God's glory. And so that's our theology of children that we think about.

They are a privilege. They're a responsibility. All within the construct of marriage. This is God's design. And we as God's people are commanded to raise children within our family. And now this strikes a chord for so many people too. Because just as divorce is difficult, some today even hope and dream of having children of their own. But that dream has been crushed by the reality that God doesn't have it in the cards for them. Now this, similar to divorce, this can lead to shame, feel like you're broken, can make you feel judged by other people who have families, suddenly big families with four kids.

But it doesn't remove the pain of infertility in this life. Infertility is a deeply painful journey, and many here at Steel Valley Church are on that journey today. Trying and failing, wondering if that's in the cards for them. But it's important to know that God does meet us where we are, offering grace to us and purpose, that you're not broken, right? For every circumstance.

Because we know that His design isn't just having offspring of our own within marriage. It's raising children. Isn't that beautiful? And friends, infertility is not a punishment of God.

If you believe in Romans 8, that there is no condemnation for those who belong in Jesus Christ, infertility is not a punishment from God. And it is probably a chance for God to display His sovereignty and His plan in your life. According to Romans 11, which was read today, we have to think about this. If God designed both the union of marriage and the disunion of divorce, God also designed the bearing of children, and guess what? The adoption of children, which are both contexts for raising children. In other words, as our culture continues to grow in sexual corruption, and people are just throwing their kids in garbage cans, welcome to our world.

[25 : 11] Maybe, not to minimize the pain of infertility, but maybe God is using the church to make a difference for those kids who might be outcasted, who might die without a mother and a father in a cold trash can.

Maybe there's something else going on here. Because God also designed the construct of adoption. Adoption. We see that in Galatians regarding salvation.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And even Ephesians chapter 1 verse 5, He predestined us for the adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will. And for those who suffer from infertility, it's important to remember that you are not broken.

You might be chosen for something. Something remarkable in this life. Chosen to provide a foundational framework for children to know the Lord who could have died in a dumpster.

[26 : 37] And to create disciples to influence the next generation. Don't mistaken our theology for children as just relating to having offspring.

Okay? The next generation is being raised by the church through adoption, through placing misplaced orphans, which is what? The church's design of true worship, caring for orphans and widows.

There are no greater than, there are no lesser than gifts from God. Both the ability to bear children as offspring, and so too the opportunity to adopt are equal gifts. There's no weighing those and measuring.

There's no judgment that comes from that. So allow yourself to be sanctified by the way of what God decrees, and trust in His ways. You are not broken.

Might 2025 be a year where we surrender our roles to the Lord and yield to His leading according to His design and what He has given to us?

[27 : 51] And the last section is God's design for singleness. Looking upon Scripture, singleness is described as a gift that enables believers to focus fully on the Lord.

It's similar to when your spouse dies and you're widowed. That gives a remarkable opportunity to devote yourself fully to the Lord in service, especially through the local church.

And Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 32 to 35, that the unmarried can devote themselves to the things of the Lord.

Without the divided concerns that come with marriage and with children. Oh, the things that I could accomplish without being married or having children, right?

That's just kidding. That was supposed to be a joke. My wife hits me. So there, I just got back at her. I'm just kidding.

[28 : 54] Similarly, Jesus affirms singleness as a deliberate calling as well. Jesus even says, those to whom it is given singleness, allowing them to serve the kingdom of heaven with undistracted purpose.

And we see that in Matthew 19. And we also see that throughout Scripture, God planned the course of many people's lives to be single, fully devoted to Him. We have Elijah, Elijah.

We have Jeremiah, who was actually commanded by God to remain single as a sign of the coming judgments upon Israel. We have John the Baptist.

We have the Apostle Paul. We have none other than Jesus Christ Himself, single. And so we have a theology of singleness, that it reflects undivided devotion to God.

And God designed constructs for that life. It significantly advances God's kingdom, and it glorifies Him. Why?

[30 : 07] Because God's the author of His design, and His design glorifies Him. And so we have to get out of our minds that singleness is always the waiting room of marriage.

Right? That's not always the case, according to the Bible. Just as receiving the gift of offspring or the gift of adoption have no distinction of greater than or less than, singleness is not a lesser state.

Being a widow is not a lesser state. It's a great opportunity and high calling by God to serve Him. Both are gifts and can uniquely equip and provide service to God alone.

If that's you, that's between you and the Lord. You don't need anybody speaking into what your plan is in your life. And we know that singleness also gets complicated as well.

It requires a deep commitment. A deep commitment. Not to have bitterness or jealousy. To married folks. To people with kids. It's a deep commitment and call to purity.

[31 : 23] And the world's sexual corruption can tempt single believers to fall into lust, to fall into immorality. And if you know what I'm saying, self-gratification.

And misusing the gift of intimacy for selfishness. For the sake of kids, I'm not going to say what I'm referring to. The same struggle exists for widows as well.

It's a high calling in these gifts that God gives. And so might 2025 be a year where God empowers those who are single and widowed to step out of shame and judgment and step into service.

Run into service. God's called you to it. This makes us think about the upcoming year, doesn't it? That God desired a symbolic union on earth to display His relationship with humanity.

What did God do? God designed the constructs of marriage. God desired the symbolic union to be protected from distortion and to protect the vulnerable.

[32 : 39] So God designed the constructs for divorce. Well, God desired the good news to spread from generation to generation, starting at birth all the way into adulthood.

So God designed constructs for raising children as offspring. But God designed Christian marriage to be a safe haven for orphans.

So God designed constructs for adoption. Not only that, God desired vessels to be fully devoted and dedicated to His service on earth.

So God designed the constructs for singleness. And lastly, God desired to care, to use those who have lost their spouse.

So God designed constructs for widows. Designed for glory. Living out God's plan in every season.

[33 : 40] It's a beautiful reality to embrace and to think about as we glorify God in this upcoming year. And worship team, you can come up and get ready at your instruments.

And I want to at least state the obvious because you may feel as if though your sins and your failures are too great.

You might be looking upon what God's Word says and the inventory of your life and be like, boy, I've missed something. Because this is a hot mess.

Well, be encouraged because if you study the lineage of Jesus Christ, you see that God truly does guide a lot of hot messes to His salvific purpose.

Now, you may feel as if your sins and failures are too great. Too great. But God's grace is greater. And it depends less on what we feel and more upon what we know according to His Word.

[34 : 53] We know that in Jesus Christ, our legal record of sin has been wiped clean by our faith in Jesus Christ.

That is a profound mystery. We don't deserve it. There's nothing we could ever do to twist God's arm to justify ourselves of why we should be saved.

We are guilty before the Lord and His holiness. But Jesus came to substitute and to pay for our guilt and our shame on the cross.

And by our faith, we live for Him. And yes, that living for Him in a different trajectory has quite a hot mess of a past. Our legal record has been wiped, though, from the moment of faith forward.

Though fornication in the past, though idolatry, though abuse in our roles is in the past, all is forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ. This creates very complicated and nuanced things that have to be considered.

[35 : 55] And if you are in this weird place of like, man, something's going on, I'm confused, talk to one of the pastors here and we can help shepherd you through those nuances. But by our faith, we cling to the cross, trusting in His ways, living in tension with the unbelieving world as we together trust in Jesus, the perfect model of each of these roles according to God's design.

You want to look at a perfect relationship? We look at the way of Jesus Christ gave Himself for others. Submitting to what God's Word defines brings Him glory through His designs.

So in that, we all must ask in our hearts right now, how can 2025 be a year where we examine God's gift, myself included, I'm not exempt from this, and how best to use His gifts in our lives wherever we are to glorify Him.

May all glory be to Christ. Please stand with us as we sing this last song. are no giving to Him.