

1 Samuel 18:20-21, 27-29 (NRSV)

²⁰Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. Saul was told, and the thing pleased him. ²¹Saul thought, "Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."

[Saul's trap is to tell David that to marry Michal he must bring back the foreskins of one hundred Philistine warriors, assuming that David would be killed in the effort.]

Before the time had expired, ²⁷David rose and went, along with his men, and killed one hundred of the Philistines; and David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Saul gave him his daughter Michal as a wife.

²⁸But when Saul realized that the LORD was with David, and that Saul's daughter Michal loved him, ²⁹Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy from that time forward.

1 Samuel 19:11-17(NRSV)

[His earlier plan thwarted, Saul hatches yet another plot to get rid of David]

¹¹Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning. David's wife Michal told him, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." ¹²So Michal let David down through the window; he fled away and escaped. ¹³Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed; she put a net of goats' hair on its head, and covered it with the clothes. ¹⁴When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." ¹⁵Then Saul sent the messengers to see David for themselves. He said, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." ¹⁶When the messengers came in, the idol was in the bed, with the covering of goats' hair on its head. ¹⁷Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"

2 Samuel 3:14-16 (NRSV)

[After escaping from Saul with Michal's help, David went on the run and never returned to her. Saul eventually gave Michal in marriage to another man, Paltiel. But when David comes into power, he decides that he wants Michal back – but not out of love. It is a political maneuver to strengthen his claim on the house of Saul. Michal is merely a pawn.]

¹⁴Then David sent messengers to Saul's son Ishbaal, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I became engaged at the price of one hundred foreskins of the Philistines." ¹⁵Ishbaal sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. ¹⁶But her husband went with her, weeping as he walked behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back.

2 Samuel 6:16-23 (NRSV)

¹⁶As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

[David then leads the people in making burnt offerings to God.]

²⁰David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!"

²¹David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD, that I have danced before the LORD. ²²I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." ²³And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

What is God's hope for us in marriage? It certainly isn't what lay in store for Michal and David. Perhaps this a cautionary tale about what really matters.

I'm often asked about all the depictions of plural marriage in the Bible. If God wanted marriage to be between one man and one woman, why do the men have so many wives? The answer is simple and as true now as it was then – too often, we simply don't live as God hopes we would live. Michal's story drives home the consequences of how such choices lead to tragedy, loss, and bitterness.

If you've never heard Michal's story, you are not alone. Most Christians, I suspect, don't know the story and probably haven't even heard of her. Yet, and brace yourself for this, Michal is the *only* woman in the Bible who is said to love a man and thereby marries him! This is her story.

God Creates Marriage

The opening chapters of Genesis are foundational to all that follows. In them we learn that God created everything and created humans in his image. We learn that he created the humans in two genders, male and female, so that each might not be alone, but have a partner. And we learn that God created them husband and wife, to be joined in sexual union, to be of one flesh. This is before Jesus, before Moses, before Abraham, before the flood. Even sin had not yet entered the picture. This is the Garden of Eden, a world in which all is right.

The union of one man and one woman, which we call marriage, is part of God's created order. It is more than a convenience or a means of managing finances. Marriage is God's gift to us. Marriage is God's grace at work. And it is God's gift to all people. It is important to see that marriage is not part of God's Law brought to the Israelites by Moses. Marriage is a gift bound up with the very creation of humanity. It is a gift even to those who do not know God.

Do we all get married? Of course not. Do we all stay married? Hardly. Yes, Peter was married but Jesus did not marry. And the apostle Paul understood his own singleness to be a gift from God, enabling Paul to devote all his energies to the service of Christ.

Marriage does not complete us as persons, yet all of us have a stake in marriage. Our families marry. Our friends marry. Indeed, most of us get married. Yet, many of us do not take marriage nearly as seriously as God does. I know that for many years, I didn't.

Bait

She had heard the stories of this young man, David. Being Saul's daughter she couldn't join in the riotous celebrations of David's victory. But she had seen the ecstatic women racing out to meet the victors, dancing and singing in joy: "Saul has killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands."

Michal had gotten to know David a bit when he had come to sing for Saul and play his lyre. And now, she loved him, simple as that. She knew David had wanted a way into the royal family and she hadn't been surprised when Saul offered her sister, Merab, to David. But, and surely God was at work here, that had fallen through! Merab was married off to someone else.

Yes, she had heard the rumors that she had been offered to David in exchange for the foreskins of one hundred Philistine warriors. Deep down, part of her knew that her father was setting a trap for David. She was no more than bait to entice David into undertaking a suicide mission. She even knew that there was no sign David loved her, that she was merely an entrée into the royal family. But she just didn't care, not a bit. She loved David and she just knew that somehow, this slayer of Goliath, would come back victorious.

And he had. And she had married David. Oh, what a day, a grand and glorious day. She loved him something awful. Her heart dreamed of a happily-forever-after life, but her mind knew that the dark obsession that had descended on her father would soon fall on her love for her husband.

Rescuer

She had hoped it wouldn't come to it, having to choose between her father and David. But it had. One night, she had gotten word of yet another plot against her husband. She knew whom she loved. She knew which side which side she would choose. So she had told David of the plot and

helped him escape out window. She had even fashioned a giant doll under his sheets so it would look like David was in bed when Saul's men came.

She had told the men that David was sick. But that had been pointless. Saul was insistent that David be killed, sick or not.

Wow . . . her father had been angry with her when he learned she had helped David get away. She had never seen him so consumed by hatred and frustration. When pressed, she

had told Saul that David had threatened her. It was a lie; but it had worked. Her father never suspected her . . . or at least he never let on, if he had.

A new life

She had hoped David would soon return, that her father would come to his senses. But no - neither happened. David's absence stretched from months into years as Saul relentlessly pursued him. And then it had gotten even worse. Her father had given her in marriage to a man named Paltiel. She hadn't been told why. It didn't matter, she was a woman, to be given away as her father pleased. She had guessed it was all about alliances and power; but feared it was simply out of spite, just one more way for the king to stick it to David, completing his separation from the family.

But God, the God of mercy and justice, had brought her new life. For Palti, as she called him, loved her . . . really, truly, over-the-top loved her. What a joy his love had been, each day fresh and filled with possibility. And so she had grown to love him.

But . . . and isn't there always a but . . . it had all been snatched away. Her father and brother had died by each other's side in battle against the Philistines. And so, David, her once-but-no-longer-beloved David, had set about consolidating his power. He wanted a

A startling metaphor

About 750BC, the Israelites had turned away from God yet again, as they had so many times before. This time, God brought forward a prophet named Hosea, who would use the most startling language and word-pictures to describe the relationship between God and his people. In a nutshell, by chasing after other gods, the people were committing adultery against the LORD God.

The covenantal relationship between God and God's people is cast as a marriage. God is the spouse who is being cheated on! God is angry. God is hurt. The Hebrew in the book of Hosea is R-rated at times. Yet God does not abandon the covenant. Instead, God says, "And now, here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to start all over again. I'm taking her out to the wilderness where we had our first date, and I'll court her. I'll give her bouquets of roses. I'll turn Heartbreak Valley into Acres of Hope. She'll respond like she did as a young girl, those days when she was fresh out of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14-15, from *The Message* paraphrase).

Could there be a more strikingly personal image of the relationship between God and his people? Centuries later, the prophet Malachi would write, "So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth" (2:15b).

legal claim on Saul's throne and that meant, he had to get Michal back as one of his wives.

So, in the way of *realpolitick*, David had demanded her return to him as his wife. It hadn't mattered that he didn't love her. It hadn't mattered that David was ripping her away from Paltiel. David wanted her and he had taken her. That simple. That terrible.

Her beloved Palti had followed them, crying all the way. No one had ever cried like that for her. No one would ever cry for her again.

Bitterness

She had tried to get used to being back in the palace, back with all the wives and concubines. But her memories of Palti were too brilliant, too near.

Once, David had come back to the city after recovering the Ark of the Covenant. A big day, yes, but he had made a fool of himself. Dancing and jumping around half-dressed; hardly the behavior expected of a king. She had even confronted him about it. But he had thrown some God-talk at her. He had even thrown in her face the truth that he could no wrong so far as the girls were concerned. So she had stormed back into the palace.

The years had passed. No David. No love. No children . . . only the distant memories of being truly loved, even if only for awhile. And once in awhile, she wondered "what if" she had met David's joy that day with joy of her own, rather than scorn? What if she had chosen forgiveness? What if . . .

Marriage as an aspect of our discipleship

There are a few keys to the biblical perspective of marriage: (1) marriage is the union of a man and a woman, (2) marriage is a gift created and given by God, and (3) God uses our marriages as a metaphor for God's covenantal relationship with his people – with you and with me. Thus, we shouldn't be surprised that the church has always held marriage to be sacramental, covenantal, and bound up with our discipleship.

In the biblical view, marriage is a covenant between husband and wife and it is a covenant before God. The UMC affirms “the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.” As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to a way of life in which marriage is a covenantal commitment and a witness to others. The writer of Hebrews urged disciples to honor their marriage, mirroring God's faithfulness in their faithfulness to each other. The apostle Paul urged married disciples in Corinth to stay with unbelieving spouses so that the unbeliever might come to know Christ (1 Cor 7:12-16). Paul urged husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and to love their wives just as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:25-33).

In a sermon for the wedding of two friends, Richard Hays, an ordained pastor and preeminent NT scholar, wrote:

“Thus, in making the covenant of marriage, you make a covenant to love one another as God has loved you – that means to love one another unconditionally, freely, sacrificially. In making the covenant of marriage, you promise to become servants of one another in love. In making the covenant of marriage, you form a union that reflects the love of God and stands as a *sign* of God's love in the world. Marriage is a sacrament in the true sense: it is both sign and vehicle of grace.”

There is a vast gulf between the secular and biblical meanings of love. In the NT, the best synonym for love is sacrifice. Love is self-giving, never self-seeking. We learn what love is from the cross.

The marriage of disciples then is not so much about the feelings of love, as wonderful as they may be, marriage is about the *practice* of love. We do not marry to meet our own needs nor to help us be fulfilled. Marriage is two partners, each seeking good for the other, each sacrificing for the other, each living out a deep and abiding covenant that endures the inevitable difficulties. This is God's hope for us.

Philip Yancey writes, “I went into marriage thinking love would hold us together. I learned instead that it required marriage to learn what love means . . . a unity sealed by God, which enables us to face economic pressures, relocation, illness, and the loss of family and friends, as well as the delights that attracted us to each other in the first place.”

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Michal's story is certainly both poignant and dramatic. I suspect that one reason most people don't know the story is that it is told in bits and pieces over the course of the David narratives. That's too bad. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to piece together a powerful story of love, priorities, and consequences. It is a bit shocking to learn that this is the only occasion in all the Bible when we are told that a woman loved a man and it leads to marriage. Why would this be? Is it simply a consequence of patriarchal cultures? What does Michal's story tell us that would be helpful in our own culture? What do the choices made by David and Michal illustrate to us about what God intends and doesn't intend for us in marriage?
2. Read again the text box above. In what ways does the biblical understanding of marriage presented there differ from your own? from the secular world? How does being a disciple of Jesus change our perspective on marriage? In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul urges the Corinthian Christians to marry only other Christians. Why do you think he would say this? What do you think of this advice/instruction? What might Paul be saying to us about the marriage of a disciple? Is this advice you would give someone you love? If not, why not? Paul also instructs the Corinthian Christians that they are to stay married to spouses who are unbelievers. Why would Paul urge to them to stay in such a marriage if he also urges them to avoid marriage to an unbeliever?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. In this week's readings, we'll begin reading through the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and even into 1 Kings as we go through the entire David narrative.

<p>Monday, 1 Samuel 27:1 – 28:2 David decides to serve the king of Achish, one of the Philistine city-states.</p>	<p>Tuesday, 1 Samuel 28:3-25 Saul consults a medium who calls up the dead Samuel!</p>
<p>Wednesday, 1 Samuel 29 David wants to join the Philistines in doing battle against Saul, but the Philistine lords turn him down.</p>	<p>Thursday, 1 Samuel 31 Saul, Jonathan, and two more sons fall in battle with the Philistines.</p>
<p>Friday, 2 Samuel 1 David mourns for Saul and Jonathan</p>	<p>Saturday, 1 Samuel 2:1-11 David is anointed the king of the tribe of Judah, putting him in immediate conflict with Saul's son, Ishbaal, and Abner, Saul's military commander.</p>

