



## **STRONGER MARRIAGE SERMONS**

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## Choose Wisely by Jeff Strite

Genesis 24:1-24:67

The German philosopher and scholar, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), was born a hunchback. Despite this deformity, which could have soured him on life forever, Mendelssohn was known as a wise and humble man.

While on a trip to Hamburg as a young man, Mendelssohn met a rich merchant who had a beautiful, young daughter, Frumtje. The young man fell hopelessly in love with her. She too was mature beyond her years, and despite his obvious physical defect, she was attracted to his gentleness, his charm, and his brilliant mind.

Mendelssohn stayed several weeks in Hamburg, spending much of his time with this lovely girl he had fallen in love with at first sight. When it finally came time to leave, he worked up enough nerve to speak to her father. It was either that or lose her forever.

The rich and powerful merchant hesitated for a long time. Mendelssohn finally asked him to speak his thoughts frankly.

"Well," said the older man, "you are known throughout Germany as a most brilliant young man. And yet... I must tell you my child was a bit frightened when she first saw you."

"Because I am a hunchback?"

Sadly, the merchant nodded.

Downcast, but not defeated, Mendelssohn asked only one last favor - the privilege of seeing her once more before he left. Admitted to her room, he found her busy with needlework. He spoke at first of various matters, then carefully and gradually, he led the conversation to the subject that was nearest to his heart. "Do you believe, that marriages are made in heaven?"

"Yes," she said, "for that is our faith."

"And it is true," he said gently. "Now let me tell you about something strange that happened when I was born. As you know, at a child's birth, according to our tradition, they call out in heaven that the birth has occurred. And when it is a boy, they announce, 'Such and such boy will have this or that girl for a wife.'

"Well, there I was, just born, and I heard the name of my future wife announced. At the same time, I heard the great far off voice say, 'Unfortunately, the poor little girl, Frumtje, will have a terrible hump on her back.' Quick as a flash, I cried out, 'O Lord God, if a girl is hunchbacked, she will grow up bitter and hard. Please give her hump to me and let her develop into a well-formed lovely, and charming young lady.'"

She married him and they lived a long and fruitful life together.

APPLY: Now that is one romantic story, and a true story - BUT... Are marriages really made in heaven? Is there someone out there who is picked out for each of us from our birth? In 1995, 85% of young adults age 18 to 24 said they believe every person has a perfect match. In other words, they were saying they believed that their potential for a happy marriage had been pre-arranged.

BUT is that a Biblical teaching? Is that what Scripture tells us... Not as far as I can tell. The idea that marriages are made in heaven sounds romantic, it sounds

comforting and it's obviously very appealing to people, but with the exception of Adam & Eve there is little evidence that God has ever "made" one person for another.

However - as this story of Isaac & Rebekah illustrates – while marriages aren't "made in heaven," under the right circumstances God CAN and WILL help us pick out the right person for us or our children – the perfect match. But what kind of circumstances would cause God to seek out this right one for us or our children?

I. The most obvious: God was at the center of this story.

ABRAHAM made his decision to send his servant back to Aram Naharaim because of a promise God had made years before:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'— he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there." (Genesis 24: 7)

In other words, God had promised that Isaac would have children... SO, Isaac needed a wife. But the women of Canaan were not Godly women. That left Abraham with the belief that the best place to look seemed to be back in the land from which he came.

And then THE SERVANT counts on God to help him find this potential bride. He prays a very trusting and well thought out prayer:

"O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'— let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." (Vss. 12-14)

Lastly, consider what ISAAC was doing as he awaited the servant's return:

"He went out to the field one evening to meditate..." (Genesis 24: 63)

Isaac is out in the field... meditating. Now, that doesn't mean he was humming some indistinct tune while contemplating his navel. In the Bible, when someone "meditated" he was concentrating on God, focusing on His promises. He was talking with God.

So, it would seem, that Isaac's entire household believed that the success of finding Isaac's future bride hinged entirely upon God.

II. Biblically, that makes sense.

We read in James 4:2 "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God."

It would seem obvious. If you want God involved in finding the perfect match (i.e. God's best for your life), it might be wise to get God involved in the beginning of selection process – before the dating gets started.

BUT, is that how it's done these days? Do single people in our culture usually ask God to help them find the best mate for their lives before they begin dating? Some do... but too often, if God's consulted at all – it's more of an after thought.

The general practice of "courtship" in our culture is to kind of drift along in life until we "just happen" find someone who "appeals" to us. Then - maybe - God gets asked His opinion. It's little wonder that in a recent poll, 84% of parents said that their children had had their hearts broken at one time or another in their lives. If God isn't drawn in at the outset of a romantic involvement then the result can be disastrous.

At this point, some of you are looking at the person you married sitting next to you and saying: "Soooo, that's what went wrong!!!" No, no, no, no... That's not how God works.

EVEN IF your spouse wasn't the most wonderful person in the world, the same God who can create the perfect date can also make the difference in the one you're married to now

SO, the 1st key to a person finding God's best for their lives or lives of our children – ask Him

Are you dating now? Ask Him. Do you have a child or grandchild or nephew or niece who's single? Ask God to find the right person just for them. I've heard of parents who start praying at their child's birth that God would begin right then to prepare the right mate. They have understood that while marriages aren't "made in heaven" – God will prepare the right person for their child if they are humble enough to ask.

III. If you're single, the 2nd principle of finding God's best for your life is to look for the right person in the right places.

Abraham told his servant: "I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living" (Genesis 24: 3)

I don't know what Abraham didn't like about Canaanite women, but there was something wrong with those girls. The situation was so terrible in the land you couldn't find a nice girl there if you had tried.

The point is, there are wrong places to look for a life long mate, a person who would please God. Bars, Casinos, certain kinds of parties and dances. It's not as if we need a laundry list of places that we can't go if we want to meet God's best for us. It's really quite simple: If you're single, don't go to those places. And if you're a parent/ grandparent or uncle & aunt, discourage your family from looking there. You will not find god's choice for you in those places.

IV. Not only are there right places to look for Godly spouse there are right qualities to be looking for in a potential mate.

Often it isn't until older that we recognize this.

ILLUS: Dear Abby: I am 44 and would like to meet a man my age with no bad habits. - Rose

Dear Rose: So would I.

Question: How do people generally decide to date someone? Answer: most often it's how they look. In fact: according to one poll 40% of Americans said they believed in love at first sight. In our culture, people are evaluated on how they look, on how well they kiss, and whether or not they can carry on a conversation long enough to keep each other interested between kisses.

That's not always true... but it's true often enough it is a recipe for disappointment. Our country has had a higher rate of divorce in past 50 years that seemingly ever before. WHY? Partly because Hollywood & Television and the Entertainment industry have educated us believe in love at 1st sight.

V. What's interesting, is that in Isaac's culture there was almost a de-emphasis on physical beauty. Not completely, mind you. The Bible tells us Rebekah was "very beautiful" (vs. 16)

But notice the 1st thing Rebekah does when she sees Isaac:

She asks "the servant, 'Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?' 'He is my master,' the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself." Genesis 24:65

In that culture, it was improper for a husband to see his bride before they married. In fact, that custom has carried over into our day. When a bride gets married, what does she usually wear as she comes down the aisle? A veil. As far as we can tell, Isaac never saw her face until after he married her

That alone would be noteworthy... BUT consider the servant's prayer when he's asking God for the right girl:

"O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'— let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." (Vss. 12-14)

Notice he doesn't ask God for a "good looking woman." He's not searching a beauty queen, he's not looking for sultry babe. It doesn't even come into his prayer. All he asks is for a girl who'll water his camels.

It common courtesy in those days to draw water from a well for a stranger, kind of like a man opening a door for a woman. BUT for this servant to expect a young lady to water his camels was another thing entirely. Do you have any idea how much water a camel can drink? A really thirsty camel can drink up to 21 gallons of water – and there were 10 camels there at the well. For Rebekah to offer to water these goes wayyyyy beyond just good manners.

AND I believe that's precisely why the servant made this request. Any girl who would offer to water someone else's camels had a servant's heart. This would be a woman with a good heart, a woman who tho't of someone other than herself. She wouldn't be type to spend all her time looking in the mirror. She was going to be the type who seeks to please her husband

In fact, Paul writes that for God's people "... a married woman is concerned about ... how she can please her husband." 1 Corinthians 7:34. That's one of the marks of a good Godly woman. (And the men said "Amen"). BUT it's also one of the marks of a good Godly husband. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:28 "... husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

SO, there's a right place to look for a mate.

And there are right qualities to look for in a mate.

ILLUS: When I was younger, I had trouble dating. It seemed I couldn't find a girl I

wanted to go out with who wanted to go out with me. Then one summer I interned under a preacher in Sault St. Marie, Michigan called Roy Chenowith. Roy took me aside one day and asked: "Are you going to get married some day?"

"Yes," I replied, "I hope to."

"Have you ever asked God to supply the woman you'll marry?" he continued.

"Sure," I answered, "many times."

"Have you ever told Him what kind of girl you're looking for?"

Well that struck me as kind of presumptuous, and I told him so. Then he explained: "If you don't tell God what kind of girl you're looking for, how will you know when He brings her to you."

That sort of made sense, so set down and made out a list of about 5 or 6 things that I felt I had to have in a mate (I didn't want to make too many requirements – I was having a hard enough time finding a date as it was). Among my requests were that she would be a Christian, that I could talk to her easily and that she would be the type that I could look at and say "Thank you God for this girl" rather than "Dear God, what have you gotten me?"

Once I prayed this prayer, I felt a sort of peace come over me. In fact, I was so confident of the outcome of my prayer that I didn't date or attempt to date for the next 3 years.

After I graduated from college, I returned to my home town and began teaching Sunday School in my home church. It was then that God brought the girl he'd been preparing for 3 years into my life. She was the friend of the preacher's daughter and had come to visit that Sunday. She came, not just for church, but for Sunday School as well. And she immediately fell in love... with the youth minister. That was ok, because that kept her around long enough for me to court her.

What was interesting was that when I first saw her, I knew she was the one I had waited for. And not only me. My dad, who was the Sunday School Superintendent at the time saw her as well. After church that day, he took me aside and said "Jeff, I think I've just met the girl you need to look at."

We were married a year later.

VI. Lastly, I want you to notice that part of having God involved in selecting a mate is perhaps the hardest for people to accept. It is being willing to allow God to say "no."

"The servant asked (Abraham), 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? ... (Abraham replied) 'If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine.'" (Genesis 24:5&8)

What's Abraham saying here? He's saying that God might just say "no."

One of the problems in people's lives is the belief that if they don't get married – it's the end of the world. Let me pass along to you some wisdom I heard a long time ago: There are worse things to experience in this life than NOT getting married. You could get married to a terrible person. A person who'll hurt you, or cheat on you, or spend all your savings on gambling or alcohol. There are all kinds of things that are worse than not being married.

But, if you trust in God, and seek His way in your life... you'll get God's best. As Jesus said: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33

If you do that – if you allow God to lead and pick out the best course for your life –

then, even when your heart is broken, you can turn to God for your strength.

CLOSE: Albert L. Peace was a man in love. His fiancée was all he had ever wanted in a woman and they planned to soon be married. Then he encountered a problem that would crush all his plans.

He was going blind.

The woman he had loved and hoped to share his life with walked out of his life forever. She could not stand the possibility of living her life with a man whom she unquestionably would need to care for the rest of her life.

Albert was shattered. But in the midst of his tragedy he sought and found the love of the One that he knew would not reject him.

Taking pen in hand he composed the words of a long favored Christian hymn:

"O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"

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# The Perfect Mate by Jeff Strite

Ephesians 4:17-5:5

I read some time ago that a panel of women debated on who they thought was the perfect man. You'd have thought it might be famous actor or wealthy tycoon. But the final conclusion of this panel was that the Perfect Man was actually....MR. POTATO HEAD.

Their reasoning: He's tan. He's cute. He knows the importance of accessorizing. And if he looks at another girl, you can rearrange his face.

APPLY: Last week, we talked about having God help us find the perfect mate. This week, we're going to talk about something even more important than FINDING the right mate.

What could be more important than finding the right person? BEING the right person. In fact, as far as God is concerned, it's more important that YOU be the "perfect mate" than for you to find the perfect mate.

I. Consider: In the book of Proverbs, we find Solomon counseling his son on life. He talks to his son about the importance of trusting God, listening to his parents, & respecting others. Solomon advises his son on finances, honesty, hard work and moral purity. Mostly it's a book of do's and don'ts. In other words, if you want to be wise: Do these good things and don't do those bad things.

BUT right in the middle of this listing of what his son should do to be wise, we find these curious comments:

Proverbs 21: 19 Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

Proverbs 25: 24 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 15: 17 Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

Proverbs 17: 1 Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

Now, why would Solomon tell his son these things? Was it like some joke, between men, about crabby women?

ILLUS: Kind of like the joke about the man who had just celebrated his golden wedding anniversary. A reporter who was present asked him this question: "To what do you attribute your longevity and apparent good health?"

"Well," said the old man, "when my wife and I were first married, we made a pact. We decided that if we ever became involved in an argument, I would leave the house and go for a walk to give us both an opportunity to cool off."

The man sighed and then said, "And I've been living an outdoor life ever since."

So, were these comments by Solomon just good natured humor from a father to his son: "you know how women are, son... he he he he!"

I don't think so. Everything else Solomon said in Proverbs dealt w/ how his son could become wise. He's not about to stop in the middle of Proverbs and tell his son how to be stupid.

No. My guess is that Solomon is telling his son that if he's not a good husband, if he mistreats his wife, he's going to end up creating a quarrelsome, ill-tempered woman.

How do I know that? Because, in the same book of Proverbs Solomon tells his son: "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." Proverbs 16:7

Translation for husbands and wives: If your ways are pleasing to God, even your spouse can be made to be at peace with you. Isn't that what it says? If having our ways please God would create peace between you and your enemies, wouldn't also work for a husband and wife?

The world teaches that "the key to a good marriage is FINDING the right person!" God teaches "the key to a good marriage is BEING the right person!" And the key to being the "right person" is make sure your ways "please the LORD."

That's why this passage from Ephesians 4& 5 is such a great instruction manual for Christian couples. If you follow Paul's teaching here in Ephesians

- you won't grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30)
- you'll be imitators of God the Father (5:1)
- AND you'll be like Jesus (5:2)

The things Paul teaches here will make it so your ways please God.

(pause) So, what's it this passage is telling me to do?

II. First off, Paul tells us what not to do in our marriages.

Ephesians 4:17-19 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

Translation: Don't live like the Gentiles. For example: Eph. 5:3 says there shouldn't even be a "hint" of sexual immorality amongst you. We all know the damage extra-marital affairs can have on marriage. But Ephesians 5:3 means that as Christians, and as Christians couples - not only shouldn't a Christian have a "cutie" on the side: He shouldn't be the type to "harmlessly" flirt with girls down at the diner.

He shouldn't be ogling scantily clad girls on the TV set.

He shouldn't have girlie magazines in his den or visit porn sites on the Internet.

I know this a place where many men struggle. Men throughout Scripture struggled with the same issues. But God's people should never accept it such temptations as normal or make excuses for falling prey to the desire.

A Christian husband that accepts that pagan type of excuse damages his relationship with his wife and undermines her confidence in him.

Not only shouldn't we live like Gentiles, we shouldn't think like the Gentiles.

Ephesians 4:18 tells us that the pagans are darkened in their understanding, and their hearts are hard.

ILLUS: A father of college girl was riding up in the elevator of her dorm to visit her room. While they were riding up, a few other girls in the elevator began to talk about certain girls living with their boyfriends, abortions that had taken place and other

forms of depravities that caused the father to blanch. What type of den of iniquity had he delivered his daughter to?

When they stepped off the elevator, the daughter spoke to his distress: "It's ok, dad, they're just talking about their favorite soap operas."

Those college girls may not have "lived like Gentiles" but they were thinking like Gentiles. Notice where these college girls were spending their time: In the company of twisted people acting out tales of perversion & self-centeredness. God tells his people: Don't spend your time with folks like that.

God told His people: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers." Psalms 1:1  
Don't spend time with the WICKED, the SINFUL or the SCORNFUL because you become like the people you spend time with. You learn to think like they do. Or as 1 Corinthians 15:33 says: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"

APPLY: Paul tells us here in Ephesians, that when you start thinking like the Gentiles

1. Your heart becomes hard, calloused. (4:18)
2. You lose your "sensitivity" to the advantages you have in your marriage (4:19)
3. You get caught up in bitterness, rage and anger (4:31)

In short, Gentile thinking creates a barrier to the intimacy you need in marriage

In addition, not only not act and think like Gentiles, we shouldn't talk like Gentiles either.

Ephesians 5:4 says: "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

Gentile talking is filled with hurtful words. Not just curse words, but also insults and put downs, jokes told about your husband or wife that belittle them in the eyes of others.

DON'T tell jokes that makes your spouse look bad.

DON'T tell things about your wife or husband that play on their weaknesses.

DON'T insult or belittle your spouse in public or private... that's how the Gentiles talk.

So, if you want a strong marriage: don't act like Gentiles, don't think like them and don't talk like them.

(pause) Those are the things you shouldn't do... but what SHOULD you do?

III. First as a Christian spouse – you should learn how to handle conflict.

Conflict is a reality in almost every marriage. Just because we shouldn't behave like Gentiles doesn't mean we won't. We pick up the tendency to argue and fight from the people we work with, the shows we watch, the books we read, the songs we listen to. Or we carry it over from how we saw our parents, or grandparents or other treat each other. Because of these influences we have learned traits and responses that create conflict in our homes.

One of the shocking realities of being married is that people who have loved each other so deeply can become so angry with each other. Such arguments can get downright scary at times.

So, how should a Christian handle those uncomfortable situations?

Realize you have the right to get angry. I always liked the King James Version of Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry." You have a right to be angry sometimes. Your husband

or wife can do some pretty stupid things, and there will be times when you have every right to be upset. BUT, while you may have a right to be angry, you have NO RIGHT to sin (i.e. act like a Gentile). "Be angry" says Ephesians 4:25, "and sin not." In what ways might my anger play out in sinful ways?

1. By violent behavior.
2. Spiteful language
3. Hateful thoughts.

ILLUS: Years ago I got really angry with my wife. She had something that I considered grossly unfair and painful. I boiled with rage. And, amazingly, I found that I enjoyed the experience. It felt good to be angry with her in that way. I reveled in the thought that I was right and she was wrong (although, to this day, I can't remember what the argument was about, or what was said - that's how trivial it really was).

What I do recall is, that after a few short minute the feeling of that rage began to fade away. But I liked the feeling of that anger so much I called it up again to my memory. Again I felt the pleasure of that moment. But once again it faded away. Once more, I reached down into the bowels of my memory and retrieved the wrong my wife had done me...

I did this 3 or 4 times. It was kind of like a cow chewing its cud, swallowing it and regurgitating it again to taste his meal again and again.

Then a still small voice asked "Is this really worth destroying your marriage over? Is this really important enough to destroy your relationship with your wife?" The stark reality of that question was like being hit with a bucket of ice cold water and it chilled me to my bones. I realized that if I continued to replay my thoughts of bitterness I would eventually end up divorced and robbed of my Christian witness.

Behavior like that grieves the Holy Spirit. Eph 4:30-31 tells us: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (How can I avoid grieving God's Spirit?) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

It doesn't matter if you're right. Reacting wrongly can hurt not only your marriage, but your relationship with God.

IV. How can a Christian protect themselves against the devastating effects of conflict?

1. Don't allow yourself to go to bed angry (vs. 26)
2. Don't allow yourself to "slander" your spouse (vs. 31)  
Don't call your spouse "Fat and ugly" or "stupid and lazy."
3. Lastly – realize an argument can leave you very angry. You'll think, but "they were wrong, they were unkind to me, they slandered me, they said things that I don't know if I can ever forgive..."

Eph 4:32 says "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Tell me, how much did God forgive you? Did He forgive only part of your sin? Most of your sin? You better hope not, because if God forgave all of your sin EXCEPT one or two things... you're going to Hell.

Praise God that He has promised that "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Ps 103:12)

V. Now I don't want to give you the impression that marriages are filled with conflict and difficulty all the times.

Now it may seem that way at times. I remember reading the true story of a woman

who told of the time her husband and she had a huge argument, she said: "we ended up not talking to each other for days. Finally, on the 3rd day, he asked where one of his shirts was.

'Oh,' I said, 'now you're speaking to me.'

He looked confused. 'What are you talking about?'

'Haven't you noticed I haven't spoken to you for 3 days?' I challenged.

'No,' he said. 'I just thought we were getting along.'"

Honestly, though, such arguments are rare in most marriages. And we've been talking about what to do when such times arise... but what do you do for your spouse when you're not arguing. Is there a particular habit we can pick up to make ourselves better husbands and wives in those times? Oh yes. Ephesians 4:29 says: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

ILLUS: Do you remember when you were 1st dating. You couldn't say enough good about them. You wrote their names in your school books, on your lockers, in your diary. Whenever anyone asked you about them – their best qualities: They were tall, beautiful, stylish, handsome, powerful, or kind. You couldn't say enough good about them.

ILLUS: Two kids were rummaging thru some old letters they found in their attic. They were love letters their parents had written back and forth to each other. One of the kids looked at the other and said: "This isn't what they call each other now."

Yes, although that's not what those parents called each other now, that is what we who are Christians should call our spouses now. We should actively look for ways to compliment our spouses.

EVERY DAY wives, you should make a list of what's good about your husband – then tell him

EVERY DAY husbands, you need to look for ways to tell your wife how beautiful she is, how you like her cooking, how exciting she is, how comfortable she makes you when she's around.

CLOSE: The end result of a Godly Christian marriage should be like the eulogy Bob Russell gave at one of the funerals he conducted:

Mary Francis Meyers died today, a great woman in our church.

Her husband, Ken, died 2 or 3 years ago.

I'll never forget being in the fireside room when they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. I said, "Ken, 50 years is a long time."

He immediately responded: "Not nearly as long as it would have been without her."

Having a good marriage isn't so much about "finding the right mate" as it is about being the right mate. And the best place to start in becoming the right mate is in becoming a child of God and learning to be pleasing to Him in all that you do...

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# Total Commitment by Jeff Strite

Ruth 1:16-1:17

A college man walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of the photograph:

"My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity."

It was signed "Helen," and it contained a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."

APPLY: How many of you think she was NOT totally committed to that relationship?

Real commitment is a highly prized commodity and those who have experienced it know how gratifying it can be to receive such loyalty.

God also loves commitment. That's why He included Ruth's statement in your Bible. In these two short verses Ruth tells her mother-in-law:

- I'll never leave you
- I won't turn away from you
- I'll go where you go, I'll stay where you stay
- AND where you die – that's where I'll die

That's the kind of commitment God admires - unqualified commitment.

I. Unqualified commitment... that's what God had in mind when He created marriage. I've heard of people using these verses from Ruth in their wedding vows. Those in love have had it engraved on their jewelry to communicate their undying devotion to another. People recognize the value of commitment in marriage. And so does God.

Jesus said: "... what God has joined together, let man not separate." Mk 10:9

In Malachi 2:16 God showed how much total commitment in marriage meant to Him by declaring "I hate divorce."

WHY? Why is such loyalty important to God between husbands and wives?

First, because God regards marriage as His creation (not man's).

When Pharisees challenged Jesus if divorce was permissible He replied:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one..." Matthew 19:4-6

He goes on to say: "...Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mt. 19:6)

Marriage was God's idea

Secondly, God prizes undying devotion in marriage because He desires couples to have Godly children. In Malachi 2 God says this:

"Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking GODLY OFFSPRING." Malachi 2:15

When Paul was talking to Christians who were married to non-Christians he wrote: "... If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise YOUR CHILDREN WOULD BE UNCLEAN, but as it is, they are holy." (I Cor. 7:12-14)

I can't explain it, I don't fully understand it, but this is one of the main reasons God hates divorce and prizes total commitment in marriage.

In addition, God used marriage as a model of His relationship with His people. Describing His love for Israel, God used a description of the marriages of the day: "'... when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you... I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'and you became mine.'" Ezekiel 16:8

Then in the New Testament, Jesus used the imagery of Himself as the groom & His church as the bride: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son." Matt. 22:2

THUS, because Jesus is our husband we have this powerful promise: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

That promise is almost an echo of the words Ruth used with Naomi.

II. What kind of commitment is necessary for a strong marriage?

1st – commitment to God. Ruth said: "Your God shall be my God"

There is an interesting piece of romantic thinking that believes... if I find the right one, the one I really am attracted to, the one who pushes my buttons and pulls all my levers it doesn't matter...

1. what they believe or
2. whether they are a Christian or
3. whether they go to church or
4. if they even love God

ALL THAT MATTERS is the chemistry that exists between us. We'll work the "church thing" out later. After all, why should this "religious issue" get in the way of true love?

To those "in love" this seems so right, so natural.

BUT, if that approach is so right, then why does God say:

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (II Cor. 6:14-16)

"Don't be yoked together with unbelievers?" Why should God care? After all, my fiancé isn't really a "wicked" person. In fact they're pretty nice once you get to know them.

AND BESIDES, wouldn't it be the ideal "missionary" effort to marry an unbeliever and

then convert them to Christ? I mean – surely God wouldn't object to that?

III. Well, God does object, and He objects for a couple of reasons.

The first one is theological:

God's theological problem is this: "We are the temple of the Living God" (II Cor. 6:16)

In other words, when you became a Christian, God put part of Himself in you. His Holy Spirit.

Wherever God dwells, that is His Temple, and He has allowed YOUR BODY to be His dwelling place.

NOW, for a Christian to make an unbeliever part of that Temple that's been set apart for God... hmmm, what would that be like?

ILLUS: Let's say, next week, when you come to church, instead of singing hymns and choruses, we sing Show Tunes:

"Climb Every Mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow till you find your dream"

Or "Just a Spoon full of Sugar makes the medicine go down..."

Or we could sing old Beatles songs:

"All You Need Is Love, do do do do do"

"Eight Days a Week, I loooooove you"

AND in place of the sermon we play a reruns. Reruns of "Everybody Loves Raymond" or "Home Improvement."

Then, just to make sure our gathering has a religious touch we would close with prayer.

How would you feel about that? Would you feel like you'd been in worship? And what if we did that every week?

After a while, even the most jaded amongst us would object: "that's not what we built this building for! We spent a lot of money to build this place of worship. How dare you bring in pagan things into a holy assembly!!!

But wait. God has just said that your body is His Temple. And He paid dearly to set aside your body for His dwelling place - the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. And we would dare to bring that which does not love God (the unchristian spouse) into union with that which He died to save? Of course God would object. That's the theological reason God objects to "mixed marriages."

IV. Now, the practical reason for only dating and marrying Christians is reflected in Paul's question:

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (II Cor. 6:15)

What does Paul mean by that? Does he mean Christians & non Christians can't enjoy the same music? won't watch the same TV shows? don't appreciate the same art? wouldn't go on vacations to the same places? No.

I believe Paul means that when it comes to things of God a Christian & non-Christian don't pull in the same direction. And because your faith will pull you in a different direction than your non-Christian spouse, that faith may end up being the source of division rather than strength to your marriage.

Jesus even warned about that: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:34-38)

The end result of your being married to an unbeliever may be that one of you will have to change to bring harmony to the house. It might be the non-Christian. Maybe they will convert and be saved. But too often it's the Christian who - for the sake of peace in the house - gives up their relationship with God for the sake of their relationship with their spouse.

Now, that doesn't mean that - if you're now married to a non-Christian - you should get a divorce. In I Corinthians 7, we read that if a Christian is married to a non-Christian they should not divorce them if the partner has no desire to leave. However, to knowingly enter into a marriage with an unbeliever creates a situation that will leave your union and your faith weak and threatened.

But by contrast, the more we and our spouses pull "together" toward God, the stronger our marriages will be. And statistics bear that out: According to John Maxwell in his book "Building a Foundation for the Family:" One out of three marriages end in divorce. One out of 50 marriages end in divorce if the couple had a church wedding. One out of 105 marriages end in divorce if the couple attended church regularly. One out of 1105 marriages end in divorce if the couple attended church regularly and had family devotions.

SO, if you want a solid marriage, you & your intended should be committed to God.

Lastly – if we want our marriages to be permanent, we need to be committed to our spouse. Our attitude should be the same as that voiced by Ruth: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (Ruth 1:16-17)

ILLUS: A man and her fiancée were at Town Hall, applying for their marriage license. After they filled out all the papers, the clerk said, "This license is good for 30 days." The groom-to-be was shocked: "No, you don't understand, we want one that's 'till death do us part.'"

"Till death do us part." That used to be understood. In fact, that phrase is still part of most wedding vows. However, over the past several years, our entertainment media has portrayed

- \* Heroes sleeping with a succession of women (James Bond)
- \* Comedies that feature "Friends" sleeping with each other
- \* And tearful romances where the girl and boy are sleeping with others until they "find each other" (You've Got Mail )

ILLUS: It's little wonder then, that in a recent Gallup poll found that 73% of those

under 45 regarded the idea of being committed to one person for life as being "useless and unworkable"

Let's face it, without God – commitment to one person for life is difficult. Even for the most committed husband or wife, there comes times when they see someone else across a crowded room who's prettier or handsomer or wittier - easier to get along with - than the one they married. And for a brief ugly moment they wonder – what if I had married them?

Without God - commitment is not natural. What's natural (in a Godless society) is to be self-centered and self seeking.

ILLUS: There's even been a new science built around that very thought. It's called "evolutionary biology." In 1994 Time magazine introduced this new discipline which maintained:

"it is to man's evolutionary advantage to sow his seeds far and wide. Women, instead seek mates with the best genes and the most resources to invest in offspring. These strategies can put the sexes in conflict and undermine love." As an example, these evolutionary biologists point to the ape culture: "Among Apes, the greater the difference in size between Male and Female, the less monogamous the Male." This then forms the basis for understanding infidelity and promiscuity in men and women.

In a Godless society – commitment is seen as unnatural.

BUT FOR GOD'S PEOPLE commitment is part of who we are. Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

ILLUS: For the Christian, marriage ought to be like the couple that had been married 39 years. They'd been through some stormy times, but in their tenth year marriage came the bout to end all bouts. The wife got so mad she pulled her suitcase out of the bedroom closet and started packing.

"What are you doing?" her husband demanded.

"I'm leaving."

So without a word he got his suitcase and started filling it with his clothes.

"Now, what are you doing?" his wife asked, bewildered.

"If you're leaving," he told her firmly, "I'm going with you."

So also, in marriage – if we're to make our marriages strong & pleasing to God - WE have to commit to "going where they go, staying where they stay, and dying where they die."

CLOSE: The idea of this type of commitment can be best be symbolized by the ring married people have on their fingers.

The Christian custom of placing a wedding ring on the 3rd finger began with the Greeks.

The early Greeks (not Christians) believed that a certain vein, the "vein of love," ran from the 3rd finger directly to the heart. Why they tho't that no one knows... but when you put those rings on each other's ring finger part of you are symbolically saying that you wanted to be tied right into their hearts. You want to be committed to each other.

Now, when the early Christians exchanged rings, they worked their way across the hand beginning with the index finger and ending with the ring finger. The groom first

placed the ring on the tip of the bride's index finger, praying "in the name of the Father," moved it to her middle finger saying, "in the name of the Son," and finally, with the words "and of the Holy Spirit, Amen," he slipped the ring on the to the third finger. In the giving of the ring, the early Christian was saying his marriage would begin with his commitment to God.

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# The Wedding by Jeff Strite

1 Corinthians 13:4-13:8

(This was a ceremony to celebrate marriage. The sanctuary was decorated as for a wedding, with a trellis at the foyer, youth escorting people to their seats, and a set of candelabras on stage. We opened the sermon with Wedding March being played. As the music was played, two of our young men lit the candles. When they were finished lighting the candles, the pianist played the part of the march where the bride would enter).

Please Stand.

We are gathered today in the presence of God to celebrate marriage.

Who is it that gives - those who desire to wed - to be married each other? Is it not God, our Father?

PRAYER

READ: I Corinthians 13:1-8a

OPEN: Some of the most astute observers of what love is like - are children: One child for example said that "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other."

In our society love is often about - how each other smells, how each other looks, how each other kisses, how we "feel" about each other.

And that's OK. Feelings are important in love. One child said: "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."

Why would that be true? Because of the way those who love each other "feel" about each other.

ILLUS: Andreas Bartels, a research fellow at University College London used an MRI to examine 11 women and 6 men who said they were truly in love. When the subjects were shown photographs of their sweethearts, different areas of the brain scan lit up - indicating higher blood flow. These "love spots" were near, but not the same as, sections that become active when someone is feeling simple lust. Looking at pictures of their loved ones also reduced activity in 3 larger areas known to be active when people are upset or depressed.

Feeling love is OK – in fact God has apparently "hard wired" us to "feel" love.

And that "feeling" of love is rarely more prominent than it in a wedding ceremony where a young couple exchanges their vows of love. That emotion of love is part of what has drawn them to that commitment in their lives.

II. What is interesting is that in I Corinthians 13, there is almost no discussion of love as emotion.

Look at it again: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of

wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (I Corinthians 13: 4-8a)

These aren't feelings, these are actions, behaviors. This is what love "looks like." Like I said, children understand love. Perhaps that's because they don't think in abstract ways. They understand what they can see, and touch and hear.

- One child said: "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK."
- Another child observed: "Love is when mommy sees daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford."
- And still another child told of "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over & paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."

Love, at its best is far more than emotion. It's action. It's something you do.

These words of I Corinthians aren't deep theological concepts:

Love is patient (when she doesn't clean house, or when he leaves clothes on floor).

Love is kind (when they are tired or irritable).

It doesn't rejoice in evil but rejoices in truth (this is the type of person who shields their family from false things of the world doesn't allow those type of influences in front door – or the back door)

Love always protects each other.

It always trusts each other.

It always hopes the best for each other.

It always perseveres with each other.

LOVE NEVER FAILS. It never gives up, it never throws in the towel.

These are not flowery emotions, this is love you can see.

When you stand before God and exchange your vows – this is the type of love God wants you to show. This is what your vows are all about.

III. The love of God is so much greater than the love the world models for us:

In fact, the love of this world could best be described as desire, or lust

ILLUS: One man said that lust

- 1) can't wait, is impulsive,
- 2) is cruel, critical and manipulative,
- 3) seeks more than it earns,
- 4) builds itself at another's expense,
- 5) is easily threatened,
- 6) is disrespectful and thoughtless,
- 7) is demanding and uncaring,
- 8) is temperamental and retaliates,
- 9) doesn't forget offenses,
- 10) commits wrong to get its own way; rationalizes,
- 11) encourages lies and covers up misdeeds,
- 12) takes to gain its own ends; lacks concern for others,
- 13) is suspicious and jealous,
- 14) says one chance and you're out,

- 15) backs out when it is no longer convenient,
- 16) it is fickle, insecure and unfaithful.

Without God in the center of our marriages – this is too often what we end up with. A selfish relationship that is self-centered and self-focused.

IV. Now some people do seem to understand Biblical love better than others. However John writes: if you want to know what love is really like - get to know God

John wrote: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 4: 7  
"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4: 8  
"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." 1 John 4: 16

That's all well and good. God is love... but how do I know HOW to love? Well, God tells us:

"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." 1 Jn 3: 18

And then God has shown us:

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." 1 John 4: 9

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." 1 John 3: 16

In fact, this is the model God uses for marriage: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Ephesians 5: 25

Love should be something others can see – not something that is "understood." One of my family friends once told his wife "I told you once I loved you... that should be enough." No it's not enough. Not for us who belong to Christ. Love should be something so obvious that even children can understand it.

One teacher told of the day her 4th grade class was working on Father's Day cards to accompany the gifts they had made. She suggested that the students might illustrate the cards with a favorite activity or something their father liked a lot - golf or fishing, for example.

Suddenly Gus raised his hand. "May I draw a picture of my mother?" he asked. "My dad really likes her a lot."

V. As you may know, I had hoped to have couples here in front – reaffirming their vows.

Some thought about it. Some said they'd like to, but didn't want to do it alone. But mostly, everyone was just too shy. And that's OK. Maybe that's the way God wanted it.

What I'd like is for everyone here to close their eyes... and those who are married, hold hands with your spouse. If your husband or wife are not here (for whatever the reason), visualize yourself holding their hands at this point and making these vows to them.

As I recite the wedding vows mentally repeat them with me. For these are

commitments made between you and God – you're making a promise here.

MEN (think on these words)

I (your name) take you again (her name) to be my wedded wife. To have and to hold from this day forward

When she's happy with me, and when she so mad me she makes me feel miserable.  
When I have lots of money, and when I have hard time knowing how to pay the next bill.

When she's sick and can't do things about the house, and when she feeling so great she makes me feel like I'm the most important man in the world.

To love her and to look at her in gratefulness till death do us part (repeat "til death do us part")

God be my witness.

WOMEN (think on these words)

I (your name) take you again (his name) to be my wedded husband. To have and to hold from this day forward.

When things go my way, and when they don't.

When he listens to me, and when he ignores me.

When he has a solid job, and when he's struggling to find a good career.

When he's tired and irritable and wants me to wait on him hand and foot.

And when he feels so good he sweeps me off my feet.

To love him and look on him in gratefulness, till death do us part (Repeat "til death do us part")

God be my witness.

Paul writes in Ephesians 5:21-33 (EYES STILL CLOSED)

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.... The wife must respect her husband."

Wives, will you willing to trust God in this?

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body....

Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself."

Husbands, will you be willing to obey God in this?

LET'S PRAY

It's customary, at some Christian weddings to celebrate the Lord's Supper. As the ushers come forward, I want you meditate on these words from Scripture:

"Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!'

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb

has come, and his bride has made herself ready.  
Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.'" Rev. 19: 6-9

CLOSE: (after Communion is taken) Marriage is about commitment. The giving of ourselves to another. Leaving our homes and joining with the one we love. So also, salvation is about commitment, it's about giving ourselves to God. It's about joining ourselves to His household.  
We give an invitation at the end of every worship service for those who desire to make this kind of commitment...

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# Making a Covenant Marriage by Mike Fogerson

Genesis 15:9-15:21

Making A Masterpiece Marriage Series

Making a Covenant Marriage (1 of 4)

February 2, 2003 \* FBC, Chester, IL Mike Fogerson, Speaker

Introduction: (After the PowerPoint presentation has ended)

A In the Bible, a very unique ceremony took place when a man and a woman got married.

a The fathers of the couple would take cows, sheep, birds, goats and would cut the animals in half and put them about ten feet apart. (Left a huge bloody path.)

b The couple would then walk barefoot through the bloody path saying with their actions, "May I pay with my life if this covenant is broken."

\*Marriage Covenant.

B In Genesis, Abraham and God enter into a covenant.

a \*God had called Abram to leave his land (HOME) and go where He wanted to go....

\*God changed Abram's name to Abraham.....

\*There was exchange. (God gave land, Abraham was circumcised.)

\*The children got the inheritance. (LAND)

b Genesis 15:9-19 (NIV)

GE 15:9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. [11] Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. [13] Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. [14] But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. [15] You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. [16] In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. [18] On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- [19] the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, [20] Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, [21] Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

c ETS: God entered into a binding covenant with Abraham.

ESS: Our marriages are covenants with our spouse.

Obj: I hope you'll see your marriages as a covenant you entered into.

(I'll give you a chance to renew your wedding vows next Sunday night.)

P.Q.: Who is treating their marriage like a covenant?

Relevant Message:

\*Over half of all marriages end in divorce. Add the number of marriages on the rocks, troubled, you've got 3/4 of all marriages sunk or sinking.

\*Your kids need to know that marriage can work!!! How? Watch yours.

T.S. Let's look at four similarities of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant.

I The first similarity of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant is...both were conducted before God.

A Historically, the covenant was a religious ceremony that was made before God (or gods) as witnesses.

a It was the one treaty that was enforceable, seen as solemn...because nobody wanted to face the wrath of their god.

b IL. Bush/Hussan would do a covenant treaty. If Bush failed in his part, he feared the wrath of God Almighty for breaking the covenant. If Hussan failed in his part he feared the wrath of Allah for breaking the covenant.

\*Both men "swore before God."

B "Dearly beloved we are gathered together here in the sight of God...to join together here in the sight of God...to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony...."

a Of the guests at your wedding who was the most important guest there? (GOD!!!)

b He heard every promise, vow,...you swore before GOD!

\*Deut. 23:21-23 (NIV)

21 If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. [22] But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. [23] Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.

T.S.: Not only did you make a covenant before God.....

II The second similarity of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant is...both were conducted before witnesses.

A As the couple walked through the blood soaked soil...people watched.

a If two leaders of opposing sides enter into a covenant....people watched.

b The reason is that the covenant makers could NEVER deny it happened.

\*Jesus himself stressed the importance of witnesses in Matt. 18:16

[16] But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

B When I perform a wedding, I have the couple sign, I sign and TWO witnesses.

a A pastor was challenged when a man came to him & said he was leaving his wife of six years. The pastor said, "Oh, no, your not. You made a vow to love your wife until death. I know I was there and I heard you. Now you stay with her and work things out." He did!

b What would happen if we were a little bit more like that pastor and challenged couples to fulfill their vows?

(IL.)In Russia, the best man in a wedding must sign the marriage register guaranteeing that the union will last at least six months or he'll pay a fine of 150 rubles.

T.S.: The Witnesses are a major point of concern, but so is this next similarity.

III The third similarity of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant is...both declared the seriousness of the commitment.

A Covenants were made on major decisions (Not for buying a new camel, cloak, curtain, tent...)

a It had to be something so major that the parties would DIE keeping their promise.

b The covenant was reserved for major life choices, treaties, union of people, nations.

B "Holy Matrimony...is commended by St.Paul to be honorable among all me; and therefore is not be entered unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly.....but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God."

a I read over the vows Pam and I took on our wedding day.

\*I vowed to love Pam for better or worse, until I'm dead...regardless of her actions and attitude.

\*She vowed to love me for richer or poorer, sickness & health for as long as we both shall live, regardless of how well or poorly I behave.

(IL.)It was the strangest response a minister had ever seen at a wedding. He asked the groom, "Do you take this woman for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, and in sickness and in health? The tentative young man replied, "Yes, no, yes, no, no, yes."

\*We assumed we'd be love in return,....but that wasn't part of the deal.

b By our vows, each of assumed 100% responsibility for the marriage.

(Covenant! Irrevocable vow only broken by death.)

RU 1:16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. [17] Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

\*If my marriage hits the skids...I'm not going to blame Pam (And she may or may not be right).

\*It's my responsibility to love her.....I can only offer my love/devotion..it's her chose to love and be devoted to me back...she promised too.

T.S.: Not only is the commitment enormous in a marriage, there are no back doors either.

IV The fourth similarity of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant is...there are no escape mechanisms.

A Can you imagine Abraham going to God five years after the covenant was made and say, "God, I think this relationship is strong enough for me start seeing other gods." "I've changed my mind. I'm not really cut out for this whole covenant thing."

a The only way Abraham was getting out of the covenant was .....death.

b Better offer? Change of heart/mind? Not happy? ...couldn't be broken!

B Five words..... "...till death do us part"

a When you get married....there are no "outs."

\*The states says "Yes." DIVORCE \*Your God says "NO."

Matt. 19:6

"[6] So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

b When Pam and I argue/fight, we'd better figure out the best way to resolve our

differences, because were going to be together for a very, very long time.

\*Not about being happy, content, pleased, satisfied....

Your either a promise keeper....or you're a .....liar.

Conclusion:

Many people see marriages as contracts. (A cracker jack lawyer can find a loop hole in any contract) Our marriages are covenants with our spouse.

We've looked at four similarities of the church service of holy matrimony and the biblical concept of covenant.

1. Take place before God
2. Take place before witnesses
3. Stresses the seriousness of the commitment.
4. There are no escape mechanisms.

B Obj: I hope you'll see your marriages as a covenant you entered into.

a Treat your marriage cheap, disregard your promises, look for loop holes.

b Take your vows/promises seriously. (Covenant)

C P.Q.: Who is treating their marriage like a covenant?

a I told you that in a covenant that both parties walk through the path of blood. In Gen.15, who walked through the blood? ONLY God.

"God loved Abraham so much and wanted to have a relationship so desperately with man that he said, "If you fail..I'll pay the price with my own blood." That's why the cross happened.

b I'm convinced that marriage is intended to mirror the relationship of how committed God is to us.

\*Have you given reason for God to leave/divorce you? Me too.

\*God is saying, "I'm going to work this out because of the covenant."

Who is treating their marriage like a covenant?

\*Alter to pray for your marriage.....

\*Wish to commit to a covenant marriage (or re-commit), I'm going to ask you to fill out the sheet in your bulleting and pass it down to your closest aisle.

\*\*\*Notice: I have used Sermon Central sermons for a very long time. If this or any of my sermons are similar to a sermon that is currently already on Sermon Central by another pastor or teacher.....chances are I have used it. Actually, there is probably absolutely nothing in this sermon that hasn't been preached before! If I used your sermon and haven't given you credit, please write me and I'll give you credit by name. I have in no way intentionally withheld credit to any work I've used/borrowed from. PLEASE NOTE THAT IF I HAVE "USED" YOUR WORK IT WAS BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOU HAD A SUPER SERMON! I prefer to preach with an outline and just rearranged your sermon. My intent is to make sermons relevant and easy for outline guys to use. If you use MY work, feel free to claim it. I do not care!!! Simply realize that I have borrowed from other preachers, too.

Mike Fogerson, Pastor, Chester's First Baptist Church

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# Creating a Passionate Marriage by Mike Fogerson

Song of Songs 1:1-8:7

Making A Masterpiece Marriage Series (2 of 4)

"Creating a Passionate Marriage"

February 9, 2003 FBC, Chester, IL Mike Fogerson, Speaker

Introduction:

Once upon a time, in the region of Lebanon in the near east, there was a girl by the name of "Cindy."

A Her father, who owned a large vineyard, had died when she was just seven.

Leaving the vineyard to her 3 older brothers, her mother and her.

a The brothers stayed drunk most of the day and harassed her as she labored in the fields. (Made fun of her dark suntan, skinny legs and callused hands)

b She dare not let them see her cry, for they would be even more merciless.

(Mother couldn't help here either)

B She would go to bed every night, crying herself to sleep to the sound of her 3 brothers snoring in a drunken stupor and her mother tossing and turning in the next room.

a One day she was pruning the vines, tying some up so they would be eaten by animals or rot in the early morning rains of Lebanon, when she noticed a young, handsome man standing at the end of the row. (She didn't make eye contact...maybe he'd go away.) He didn't. After 15 minutes of him starring at her she starred back.

"The young lily has noticed me." The young man announced.

"Me? I've spent too much time in the sun, I'm much darker than any girl in this area." she said.

\*"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on. Let me take a closer look."

SS 1: 15 How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.

\*My, my you are sweet with words, I haven't seen you around here before. Who are you? "You don't know who I am? Surely you must have seen me around here? Let's just say, I'm a shepherd lad. Can I see you here tomorrow, at about this same time?" "Oh, yes, I'm not going anywhere. My work keeps me chained to this vineyard."

b The next day as "Cindy" was working, the shepherd lad helped her finish her work and then he said, "I have a surprise for you." He led her over a knoll where there was a beautiful meal spread out for them on a fine blanket beside a brook flowing gently, just under the largest cedar tree on the property.

\*During the dinner the lad asked "I'd like to speak to your father Cindy." Indicating he wanted to set up a marriage agreement with her father. He's dead. Can I talk to your mother? I'm afraid my brothers will have more say in this matter. They won't want to lose my labor. "I see, I think I know how to handle them. Just leave it all to me." (Cindy was skeptical, but if anyone could handle her brothers, it was this young man.)

\*"I've got to go away for a while, will you wait on me? " "Yes, but don't be long. I don't think I can stand to be separated from you." "I will be back soon, until then, I will think only of your lovely face."

(Cindy was so excited. One day she was laborer in the fields, the next, an engaged woman anticipating escape from the tyranny of her brothers.)

C Weeks went by and she heard nothing from the Shepard lad, her mother/brothers said nothing about an engagement. (Every thought of Cindy's was for her love.)

a Occasionally her dreams turned dark,

SS 3:1 All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves;

I looked for him but did not find him. 2 I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him.

b Weeks and months passed. Doubts increased. Maybe The Shepard boy had forgotten her. Maybe he'd found another and decided not to marry Cindy after all. She just knew he'd come back.

\*One day she was working in the vineyard when the neighbor girl said over the fence, "The king is coming! The king is coming! SS 3:7 Look! It is Solomon's carriage,

escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel, 8 all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with his sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night. 9 King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon. 10 Its posts he made of silver, Its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem.

\*The girl took Cindy by the arm and went to the processional. Cindy watched in awe as the soldiers marched by her, two by two with their beautiful uniforms and razor sharp swords. Then she heard a command to "Halt" and the royal carriage stopped in front of her.

\*A face popped out of the window, and with a sly smile the king looked into Cindy's eyes and said, "SS 4:1 How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! SS 2:10 My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me."

D The next few hours were a blur. (There were lavish gifts for her and her family. The marriage celebration was greater than any dream she could ever dream.)

a Later that night, after the celebration, it was just she and her husband king in the king's chamber, "He reached for her and whispered in her ear... SS 4:3 Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely.." She blushed, and continued, "SS 4:9 You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

b He put a necklace around her neck and said, "SS 4:12 You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.."

\*Poetry poured from her lips, "SS 4:16 Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits."

\*With those words the king blew out the candles and led her to his bed.

E Their love rarely ever waned, but Cindy couldn't forget her vineyard. She longed to see the farm, smell the earth, the smell of the blossoms when they opened on the vine. She wanted to go back.

a SS 7:12 Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom-- there I will give you my love.

b The king couldn't resist. With a huge entourage, the couple returned to the site of their engagement, he embraced in the fields of your youth SS 8:3 His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me.

\*Cindy put her head on the king's chest and silently said, "SS 8:6 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its

jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. 7  
Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.  
The lived happily ever after.....

This is a fictionalized account of Solomon and a Shulamite woman based on the non-fictional literature found in the Song of Songs (Solomon.) I gave the girl the name "Cindy", Short of Cinderella.

A The Song of Songs almost didn't make into the Bible. (The name God isn't mentioned ONE time in the entire 8 chapters!!!)

a The most erotic literature in the Bible. Ancient times, Rabbie's forbid any man under the age of 30 to read the text for fear of the emotions/passion it brings up.

b It got into the biblical cannon because it's thought that the story is an allagory of God's intense passionate love for his people (Israel/Church).

\*ETS: Solomon had a passionate love for his wife. (God was blessed by that!)

\*ESS: Our marriages bless God when passion is present.

B What are you doing to make your marriage passionate? (PQ)

a I hope you'll recommit yourself to pursuing the passion in your marriage. (Objective)

b Let's look at two passion pointers that can help us pursue passion. (T.S.)

I Lasting passion is reserved ONLY for marriage.

(If you're married, congratulations. You are eligible to enjoy one of the greatest blessings you can experience this side of heaven.)

A Our world doesn't quit see "passion" in the way God does.

(From 1970 to 91, the federal government spent \$2 billion to promote condom usage and safe sex. 1992, the fed. gov. spent \$450 million on safe sex/condom campaign and only \$8 million dollars was spent on abstinence programs.)

a Our world says.....

Premarital sex is okay.

Extra-marital sex is okay.

If your married, but not happy.....okay to cheat

If your married but you've married the wrong person....okay to cheat

If your married, but you've met the love of your life...okay to cheat

THAT MAY BE OKAY TO THE WORLD. IT'S NOT OKAY TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

b Some Christians get fooled into thinking thy can be attracted to someone, but as long as they didn't get romantically/physically involved, they are staying faithful.

\*MT 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, `Do not commit adultery.' [28] But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

\*Adultery is a matter of the HEART. (Causes just as much pain, grief, breach of trust as a physical encounter. I promise!!!)

B 1CO 7:1 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.

[2] But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. [5] Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.....8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. [9] But if they cannot control themselves, they should

marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

a Sex is for the marriage and the marriage only.

(Any physical/romantic outside of the marriage is going against God's plan)

\*January 26, 1998 President Clinton said, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky."

\*Regardless what type of contact he had with Ms. Lewinsky, it was a sexual relationship outside of his marriage.

HEB 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

b PASSION outside of the holy union of a man and woman is wrong..dishonors God...sin.

\*If you want passion/intimacy..it's found in YOUR marriage.

(It's the only place God has put lasting passion.)

II Partnership breeds passion.

A Although in our opening story, Cindy and Her king lived happily ever after...the real King Solomon and the Shulamite woman didn't.

a Solomon took on 700 wives, 300 concubines later in his life.

(Some commentators believe that these were for political purposes, displays of his wealth and power.)

b Listen to the cynicism, hopelessness, misery, depression in King Solomon's writings near the end of his life.

ECC 2:1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. [2] "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"...[8b]..I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. [10] I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

\*God had allowed Solomon to everything he ever wanted, including unlimited sexual pleasure....he was unfulfilled.

\*He was at his happiest, most passionate when he was in a monogamous marriage/partnership with the dark tanned Shulamite woman of his youth.

B You & I will know no greater love than God's love for us.

a God's love for us .....

Has power....

Was initiated by Him. (I have chosen you.)

Is unconditional (No IFS)

makes Him eager to restore us when we drift away. (Father of the prodigal son)

prevents him from ever giving up on us. (He's waiting to return)

is proven by the sacrifice of his Son on our behalf.

He loves us completely. (You can't do anything to make God love you any more/less.)

When we enter into a loving relationship/partnership with God, we discover this prolific passion that is supplied by the lover of your soul.

b Who wants to be loved by their spouse like that?

Compare your love for your spouse up against God's love? Shallow.

Ask God to make your marriage of "we" a marriage of "three."

What God is telling us through Song of Solomon is passion is found in the partnership of marriage.

## CONCLUSION:

Harley Sheffield gained celebrity status through an unusual mishap. He was part of the fifteen thousand-mile relay that carried the Olympic torch to the one hundredth gathering of the games in Atlanta. His section of the relay went over the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in Washington on May 7, 1996. While carrying the flame in a special stand on his bicycle, the rear tire blew out, Sheffield lost control of his bike, and the Olympic flame went out. People gasped in disbelief, but the attenders of the torch knew exactly what to do. They simply reached into the van that accompanied the traveling torch, pulled out a new torch and lighted it from the "mother flame" which always stays in the van. The procession continued and Sheffield earned a spot on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. What happened on that Washington bridge happens all of the time in our Christian pilgrimage. We stumble and the flame of spiritual zeal is doused. We stare at the extinguished torch and wonder if we can ever again burn with spiritual passion. When we turn in repentance we find that the Holy Spirit has been with us all of the time and he carries the "mother flame" that can never go out. Our zeal can be reignited and the standard of Christ can once again burn brightly in our lives.

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# Creating a Fighting Marriage by Mike Fogerson

Ezekiel 16:9-16:34

Making A Masterpiece Marriage Series

Creating A Fighting Marriage (3 of 4)

February 16, 2003 Chester's FBC, Chester, IL Mike Fogerson, Speaker

Introduction:

A couple had been arguing about everything for years. Both spouses were tired of living in their state of perpetual conflict. Finally, the wife tipped off her husband about her prayer life. She said, "I've been praying for God to help us stop all of this arguing by taking one of us to Heaven. When he answers my prayer, I'm moving in with my sister."

A. When two people spent so much time together, there will be "heated" debates. We all have disagreements in our marriages.

a (ETS) In the Old Testament we see God arguing with His marriage partner all the time.

B (ESS) we can have these disagreements with out destroying our marital relationships.

a I hope you'll take these rules into your next fight as a married couple.(PQ)

b Let's look at two rules of engagement that God abided by when he had a fight with His lover. (TS)

I The first rule of engagement is that God showed astonishing patience.

Ezekial 16

[9] " ` I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. [10] I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. [11] I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, [12] and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. [13] So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. [14] And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD. [15] " ` But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. [25] At the head of every street you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, offering your body with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. [26] You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and provoked me to anger with your increasing promiscuity. [27] So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. [28] You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. [29] Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied. [30] " ` How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! [31] When you built your mounds at the head of every street and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a

prostitute, because you scorned payment. [32] " ` You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! [33] Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. [34] So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.

35-45.....tells of God's tough love for Israel

[41] They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. [42] Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.

A Israel, His Wife, was defiling herself with anyone who wanted to lay in her bed. a God said, you have given yourself away for free.....you pay other lovers to be with you. (Not only a Prostitute, but a Cheap prostitute. Your giving your lovers gifts that I gave you.) \*Floozy, trollup, whore....converted their home into a brothel.

\*If anybody has ever had a reason to get a divorce it was/is God!!!!

\*DON'T THINK HE DIDN'T THINK ABOUT IT!!!!

b EXODUS 32:

9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. [10] Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." 11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? [13] Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ` I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " [14] Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

\*God is saying "I'm sick of you, I'm leaving!!!!"

\*Moses remembered the covenant and called God on it! (Vv: 13)

\*God didn't leave the marriage and God had the right to challenge Israel's faithfulness. (He did)

\*For hundreds of years God has fought for his marriage...patiently saying "return to me" "Come back to me."

B It's sad how many couples aren't willing to hang in there when their marriage hits the skids.

a A very popular divorce in our time are "Amiable Divorces."

\*Couples have drifted apart, go there separate ways and they throw in the towel w/o a fight.

\*I see God patiently fighting for his marriage for centuries, if God patiently fought for his marriage....I want to be like God.

b If God's marriage teaches us anything, it's be patient with your marriage.

\*A 1998 study in Minnesota found that the majority of those who have gone through a divorce wish they had tried harder to work through their differences. This study, by the nonprofit Minnesota Family Institute, discovered 66 % of those divorced look back with regret that they didn't give their marriage a better effort.

C Howard Hendricks has a unique way of making you squirm on the horns of a dilemma. One of those unsettling dilemmas involves marriage partners who are frustrated with the way their spouse has turned out. One such guy approached Dr. Hendricks with a list of gripes about his wife.

a Hendricks consoled the guy with his Columbo-type tactics. He told the man he was

really surprised that a man of his intelligence would marry a woman with so many blatant faults. The man quickly defended his prenuptial decision by declaring, "She wasn't that way when I married her!" Hendricks then retorted, b "Then I guess it means you made her that way."

\* The fault we often foist upon our spouse can frequently be the result of our own activities, or lack thereof.

As one old cowboy put it, "A man who treats his wife like a thoroughbred will never end up with an old nag."

T.S.: God showed astonishing patience as a rule and he also followed this next rule of engagement.

II The second rule of engagement is that God isn't passive about the problems. A Married couples fight. (I'm always weary of those who say 'We never fight') EVEN GOD FIGHTS WITH HIS PARTNER!!!

a In Psalms (among other places), we see God's spouse venting about how God was acting towards them.

PS 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

PS 94:1 O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. 2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. 3 How long will the wicked, O LORD,

how long will the wicked be jubilant?

b God also let His lover know how displeased He was them. (Didn't ignore)

ISA 43:20 The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. 22 "Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel.

\*God sounds like a jealous husband who had a wife that didn't appreciate all the hard work he did.

\*Jeremiah 8:6-13

WHEN THERE WAS A PROBLEM BETWEEN GOD AND HIS SPOUSE....IT WAS BROUGHT OUT IN THE OPEN.

B Why do couples let important issues slide until they become a major problem?

a By the way...a spouse doesn't need to endure unending abuse, whether physical/emotional. (There's nothing spiritual about being doormat.)

\*Submit doesn't mean submit to abuse, that's wrong.

b Deal with your problems, talk them out. (Going to your separate rooms doesn't solve problems.)

C Dr. James Dobson, Love Must Be Tough (Dealt with infidelity in a marriage)

"No one labeled the behavior for what it was: selfishness and sin! Therein lies a fundamental problem. These loving, gracious people inadvertently shielded their wayward spouses from the consequences of infidelity. If there is anything that an adulterer does not need., it is a guilt-ridden mate who understands his indiscretion and assumes the blame for it. Such a person needs to be called to accountability, not excused by rationalization!"

\*DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM.

Conclusion:

A When two people spent so much time together, there will be "heated" debates. We

all have disagreements in our marriages.

a (ETS) In the Old Testament we see God arguing with His marriage partner all the time. (ESS) we can have these disagreements with out destroying our marital relationships.

b We've looked at two rules of engagement that God abided by when he had a fight with his lover.

He showed astonishing patience.

He isn't passive about the problems

B I hope you'll take these rules into your next fight as a married couple.(PQ)

a Options? Throw in the towel...ignore the problems that can destroy your marriage

b Be patient with your spouse...deal with your problems.

C Who is fighting by the rules?

a While attending her first wedding, a little girl whispered to her mother, "Why is the bride dressed in white?" The mother responded, "Because white is the color of happiness, and this is the happiest day of her life." The girl thought about this for a moment, then asked, "So why is the groom wearing black?"

\*Your marriage is going to have a lot of "white" happy times...but you and I both know there is going to be some black too. Fight by the rules of engagement.

b Who is fighting by the rules? (P.Q)

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# God Prepares Adam for a Wife by Mike Jeffress

Genesis 2: 4-2: 25

Marriage 101--Lesson 1

The Preparation For Marriage

Text: Genesis 2: 4-25

Mike Jeffress, Nacogdoches, Texas

## INTRODUCTION

A. This morning begins our series titled Marriage 101. And you might be tempted to think what does this young preacher know about marriage? Well on Saturday of this week, Theresa and I will celebrate our 11th wedding anniversary. So I have a little experience to speak from. But I being the conscientious preacher that I am, I decided to talk to Theresa about my intent to preach this lesson, and I asked her, "Honey, do you think I am qualified to teach on the subject of courtship, romance and marriage." She looked longingly into my eyes and just sighed, "Sweetie you wrote the book."

B. Seriously, we can be thankful that God wrote the book on the subject of marriage and we can turn back to Genesis chapter 2 for a look at Marriage 101. But before we do I want to share with you a short news article I came across in Friday's issue of the Washington Times. Read from Cheryl Wetzstein, "Cohabitation Levels Rising, Study Finds," Washington Times, Nov. 15, 2002.

C. "Being married matters," Janice Shaw Crouse says in this article. Did you pick up on that?

D. And I think the reason why so many marriages are failing today and the reason why so many are choosing to cohabit instead of marriage is because they have either not taken or they have flunked out of Marriage 101. So this morning class is in session. We are to study the first recorded married couple in the Bible. I am speaking, of course, of Adam and Eve. Whenever the Jews asked Jesus about conflicting ideas concerning marriage and divorce, Jesus pointed them back to Adam and Eve in the garden as the example from God for what marriage is supposed to be.

So let's read together beginning at Genesis 2: 4-24.

I want us to note in this passage the first important lesson of Marriage 101.

### 1. Preparation for Marriage.

Now when I speak about preparation for marriage this morning I am going to put the onus where the Bible does: on the man! God puts the onus on the man to prepare for marriage and make it work. Man gets himself ready so he can win his woman's hand. And as distasteful as this may sound to feminist movement leaders today, the Bible is clear that it is the man's initiative to win the woman. The only exception in the Bible to this rule that I can recall is Ruth. Ruth was quite forward in approaching Boaz to marry her. But the norm is that the man makes the first move and takes the necessary steps to win a woman's heart. And what are the necessary steps? I'm glad

you asked.

–Adam had a relationship with God

Girls, if a man does not have a relationship with God then you don't have one with him. You don't even date a man if he is not God's man. This is the first and most important criteria for selecting a mate. 2 Cor. 6: 14 says do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Adam had a relationship with God before he had a relationship with Eve.

–Adam had a job

Adam learned the discipline of obedience and work by doing the job God gave him to do in the garden. And girls if a man doesn't have a good job, you don't let his good looks and sweet talking sway you. If a man will not work he will not eat, the Bible says. Mike's paraphrase is, "If a man will not work at a respectable job, he will not have my consent to marry any of my daughters."

I realize a growing trend in our culture is to marry while in college. And girls you can tell whether or not a man will have a good job by how disciplined and successful he is in his class work. If a guy barely makes the grade and is cutting class regularly, this guy is going to have a tough time holding down a job.

And if a guy doesn't have a good job, then the financial stress will be a huge obstacle. You can say, "But we love each other and if the money runs out we'll just live on love." That sounds good, but it doesn't work. You can't go to the grocery store and say, "Put these groceries on my love bill." "You can't pay the rent with love." "You can't tell the power company, 'Charge my utility bill to my love bank.'"

Financial strain is the number one factor in divorce courts today. Adam had a job before he had a wife.

–Adam had a place to live

Adam had a home in the garden before he had a wife. If a man is going to marry one of my daughters I want to know that he has a safe place to house her. Guys she might tell you she doesn't mind living in a one room apartment or staying in the garage apartment at your parents. But that won't last long. I am convinced that most women need a home they can call their own with walls they can call their own and put all the wall hangings up without worrying about leaving holes. Furniture they can call their own and move and rearrange at least once every two weeks.

Adam had a relationship with God, he had a job, and a place to live, then finally, and oh-so-important...

–Adam recognized his need for a wife

Adam knew he was not complete. He knew he was missing something. This is one of the reasons why I require couples I do premarital counseling with to read Willard Harley's His Needs, Her Needs. For marriage to work both parties have to recognize needs that they have that can only be met by the other. The first exercise that I have couples go through in premarital counseling is to sit down and write a letter to

each other. They have to finish this line, "I want to marry you because..." Let me share with you what I am hoping to hear from a man by reading an excerpt out of my files from one of these letters (I've changed the names).

Dear Alissa,

I suppose there are a lot of reasons why I would like to be married to you...we get along well and work well together as a team...I need you in my life so that I may be the very best person I can be...you help me...I guess what I am saying is that I need you in every aspect of life so I can be my best. I love you.

Love,

Jerry

This is a letter written by a man who recognizes his need for this woman in his life.

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# God Provides Adam with a Wife by Mike Jeffress

Genesis 2:4-2:25

Marriage 101--Lesson 2

God Provides Adam with a Wife

Mike Jeffress, Nacogdoches, Texas

A. This morning I want to pick up where we left off a few weeks ago in our series on family. At this point in our series we are discussing Marriage 101 principles from Adam and Eve. Why Adam and Eve? Because they are the first married couple in the Bible. When we look at Adam and Eve we see what God intended when he gave us the institution of marriage. Last time we looked at the principle of preparation for marriage. Before Adam was ready for a wife there were four things that had to be in place. Adam first had to appreciate his relationship with God. So he had to spend some time in the garden alone just walking with God. Second, Adam needed a job, so the Lord gave him the task of keeping the garden to prepare him for the discipline of hard work it takes to have a wife and raise a family. Third, Adam needed a place to live. So the Lord gave him a home in garden. And finally, Adam needed first to realize his incompleteness and his need for a woman to complete him, so the Lord brought all the animals before Adam to show him that each had a mate and make him aware of his need.

B. So girls take note of this principle of preparation and don't settle for less. And guys take note of the pattern set for you in creation by Adam and try to follow it.

C. Two boys were discussing whom they might like to marry when they grow up. Three-year-old Alex said he planned to marry his newborn baby sister, with whom he was quite smitten. "Oh, you're so silly," said six-year-old Patrick. "Don't you know you can't marry relatives?" "Well, that just shows what you know," said Alex. "Just look at Mom. She married Dad, and he's her husband!" (Cindy Smith, Alabama. Today's Christian Woman, "Small Talk.")

D. Certainly there is a certain type of person who is right for us to marry and others that are not appropriate candidates for us. But how can we know. The first test is the principle of preparation. You see whether or not that guy has prepared himself for marriage, like Adam. But the second thing to keep in mind is the principle we will look at this morning and that is the principle of provision.

## 1. Provision for Marriage

A. When I speak about provision for marriage I am referring to God providentially providing for our needs. When the man recognized his need for a wife, God provided. And this is a most basic point to remember, God provides when we recognize our need for him to do so. Someone worded it this way

I gave them to Him, All the things I'd valued so

Until I stood there empty-handed. Every glittering toy did go.

And I walked earth's lonely highways In my rags and poverty;

Till I heard His voice entreating, "Lift your empty hands to Me."

Empty hands I lifted to Him, And He filled them with a store

Of His own transcendent riches Till my hands could hold no more.

And at last I comprehended, With my mind so slow and dull,

That God could not pour His riches Into hands already full.

B. God doesn't pour blessings into hands already full, but when we lift our empty hands to him, well that's a different story. And I think this principle certainly applies to marriage as well. I believe that when we desire a mate for the right reasons and the time is right, God will provide—if we trust him for it.

C. We certainly see this principle of provision in the story of Adam and Eve. A young child came out of his Sunday school class and told his parents, "The teacher told us how God made the first man and the first woman." His father said, "Oh really, well can you remind your mother and me how He did it." The little girl replied, "He made man first, but the man was very lonely with no one to talk to, so God put the man to sleep, and while he was asleep, God took out his brains and made a woman out of them.

D. Well, we know that is not quite right. It is true that God made that man first and later made the woman out of a part of the man's anatomy. But it wasn't his brains, it was a rib.

—God created Eve from Adam's rib

Gene 2:21 (NIV) So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Now there are some things in the Bible that we have to read between the lines in order to understand. And I think this is one of those things. Why did God make Eve from Adam's rib? Well, if we read between the lines, this is what we discover the fuller conversation between God and Adam....

"I'm lonely," Adam told God in the Garden of Eden. "I need to have someone around for company."

"Okay," replied God. "I'm going to give you the perfect woman. Beautiful, intelligent and gracious -- she'll cook and clean for you and never say a cross word."

"Sounds good," Adam said. "But what's it going to cost me?"

"An arm and a leg" God replied.

"That's pretty steep," countered Adam. "What can I get for just a rib?"

Seriously, I think beloved Bible commentator, Matthew Henry has the proper insight

when he offers: "Eve was made by God not out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved."

God provided for Adam a lifelong companion to be by his side. How fitting that she be fashioned out of his side.

But notice not only does God create the right woman for Adam, but also...

–God brought woman to man

Read verse 22 again, Gen 2:22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Sometimes we hear talk about a "match made in heaven." Well, I believe there is such a thing. I believe there is somebody for everybody, and if we all seek God's will we will run into each other. The question you then raise is, "How do I know?" Guys, do you just walk through life until you see that girl that makes you do a double take and say, "Son!" Perhaps, if you are looking for the right traits. But on the other hand it might take you a number of years after the fact to look back and see what God's plan was in bringing you and your mate together.

Perhaps the best compliment a husband ever gave his wife was given by Joseph Choate, one-time U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. When asked who he would like to be if he could come back to earth again after death, Choate replied without a moment's hesitation, "Mrs. Choate's second husband."

That's a testimony of a man who would tell you God brought him the right woman.

Now let's lastly notice what kind of response God's provision calls for. After the Lord brought the woman to the man...

Gene 2:23 (NIV) The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Here we see the need to...

–Leave, cleave and become

To be alliterative we might say we need to break, bond, and become. There is an appreciation for what God has provided symbolized in the breaking away of former relationships in order to bond with the new one. There is complete acceptance and appropriation of God's provision in the breaking and bonding. And there is a commitment and devotion implied in the becoming one. The text says the two shall become one flesh. This means the becoming one is a process. You agree to become one when you marry. When you avail yourself of the sexual privileges of marriage you consecrate that oneness. And you are two halves of one whole, but there is still a deeper process of becoming one that must take place.

According to another reading between the lines tradition. Adam was fudging a bit on his becoming one. He was not giving Eve all the time and attention she needed. So when Adam stayed out late for a few nights in a row, Eve became upset.

"You're running around with other women," she charged.

Adam responded, "You're being unreasonable, you're the only woman on earth."

The quarrel continued until Adam fell asleep. But he soon was awakened by someone poking him in the chest. It was Eve.

"What are you're doing?" Adam demanded.

"I'm counting your ribs," said Eve.

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# Purity of Marriage by Mike Jeffress

Genesis 2:25-2:25

Marriage 101–Lesson 3

The Purity of Marriage

Mike Jeffress, Nacogdoches, Texas

## INTRODUCTION

A. Rita Fischer shared a story about her wedding day in Christian Reader Magazine.

The day was unseasonably warm when my husband and I got married and, to make matters worse, the air conditioning in the church wasn't working. Becoming increasingly uncomfortable in my gown, I grumbled during the photo session, then endured the receiving line, cutting the cake, even opening the presents. But when I saw the mountain of cards to open, that was it. Smiling, I said to the guests, "You'll have to excuse us, but we're very hot and need to do something about it." My face grew even hotter when I saw my husband's look and realized what I had said (September/October 1996, p. 18.)

B. As we continue in our Marriage 101 course today, you might want to take note of Rita's experience as something not to do when you get married.

C. We've already learned two important principles from looking at the first marriage in the world back in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve. One is the principle of preparation. Before God gave Adam a wife, Adam had a relationship with his Heavenly Father. This is foundational. The Bible tells us that bad company corrupts good morals (1 Cor. 15:33). The Bible tells us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what do righteousness and unrighteousness have in common (2 Cor. 6:14). The Bible warns in 1 Cor. 7 that those who marry will face many hardships and trials and this is true. In defending the blessings of living a single, celebrate life wholly devoted to the Lord, the Apostle Paul says that "... those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this" (1 Cor. 7:28). So, knowing that married life creates a whole new world that will have its various and unique pressures, why would you want to add to the trials and hardships of married life, the challenge of marrying a spouse who does not share your faith in the Lord Jesus? Knowing the problems this scenario would magnify, the Apostle Paul instructed widows to remarry "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). The NIV translates it, "he must belong to the Lord." Eugene Peterson's popular paraphrase of the New Testament, titled *The Message*, translates, "She will, of course, want to marry a believer and have the blessing of the Master."

So the first and most important criteria for choosing a mate is does he/she believe in the Lord Jesus. So, moms and dads what do you do if little Johnny or Susy takes a liking to someone who is not a Christian. I think your first move is to study the Bible with that person and try to convert him or her to the Lord Jesus. Guys and girls if you see some pretty young thing that you want to pursue a relationship with, don't let it get past first base if a) the person doesn't believe in the Lord Jesus and b) shows no receptivity to the gospel.

Adam had a relationship with God. And also to be prepared for a wife he had a job.

He had a place to live and he had a realization of his incompleteness without a mate. That's a quick review of the first Marriage 101 lesson on the preparation of marriage. Our second lesson in this series noted the principle of provision for marriage. God provided the right mate at the right time for Adam. When the proper preparations had been made, God created Eve and brought her to the man (Gen. 2:22).

After that lesson last week on the Lord's provision for marriage, someone brought me a copy of a wedding program in which the bride and groom wrote a message that beautifully illustrates this point and I want to share it with you. (Read message).

D. So, having noted the principles of preparation and provision, we are now ready to observe in the Garden the third Marriage 101 principle: the purity of marriage.

### 1. Purity of Marriage

Gene 2:25 (NIV) The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

By the time Moses wrote down Genesis 2:25, public nakedness had long since become a token of shame. When Noah and his family exited the ark, one of the first stories is about the shame and cursing of Ham for seeing his father's nakedness (Gen. 9:20ff). You might remember that Shem and Japheth honored their father by walking backwards with a garment across their shoulders to cover the shame of their father's nakedness.

But here in the garden, prior to sin's corruption, we see a man and his wife both naked and feeling no shame. What we see here is the purity for which God intended in marriage. What is the message in this for us today? What application can we make? Can we talk about this? Can we talk? I'll say this anyone who is old enough to understand what I am talking about here, needs to understand it, Amen?

As we talk about applying Gen. 2:25 to our lives today, there are two applications which are related. One is the only people who should be seeing each other naked are husbands and wives, and this is pure and right in God's sight. You can read Leviticus chapter 18 for a long list of people whose nakedness you are forbidden to uncover. But here in the Garden is a man and his wife without a stitch on and there is no shame. Brothers and sisters, there is nothing more pure than a man and his wife seeing each other naked for the first time. This is intended by God to be a pure and holy moment. So we read in Hebrews 13:4,

Hebr 13:4 (NIV) Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

The marriage bed is pure! And is to be kept pure. A man wrote to Dear Abby some time ago. He said, "Dear Abby: I am in love and I am having an affair with two different women. I can't marry them both. Please tell me what to do, but don't give me any of that morality stuff. Abby's answer is classic. "Dear Sir: The only difference between humans and animals is morality. Please write to a veterinarian."

Basic morality tells us it is right for a man and a woman to save themselves for marriage. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure." And for today I would stress that marriage bed's purity must be prepared for. Far too many people are sexually impure before they ever marry. Dianne Sawyer a few

years ago on ABC's Primetime Live did a feature story on teenage sexuality and reported that 1 out of 3 girls has lost her virginity by the ninth grade and 70% by the time they graduate high school. I don't know where she got her figures but it is a no-brainer that American society today is obsessed with sex, and the television programs and music targeted to teens glorify promiscuous sex. But listen to me young people, there was not a single girl that Diane Sawyer interviewed who said they did not regret keeping themselves pure for their future mate.

To the pure all things are pure, the Bible says (Tit. 1:15), and marriage is a pure relationship intended for two sexually pure people. I like what one beautiful young lady who was a senior in high school had to say, "When we date, we start giving gifts, like flowers or candy. When a couple becomes engaged, they give special things -- a diamond and very personal things. The most personal gift that I can ever give is myself. I have nothing more precious to give. When I marry, I want to give my husband the best that I have--my whole self as completely as I can."

And listen to the commitment to purity that one godly teenage boy professed:

The parents of my girlfriend place their trust in me. I will not violate it.  
I will respect my girlfriend as I expect other men to respect my sister.  
I will respect womanhood, because my mother is a woman.  
I will ask my girlfriend to do nothing I would be ashamed of if my mother found it out.

My girlfriend has given me the honor and pleasure of her company.  
It is wrong for me to expect more in payment for this date.

My girlfriend will be a wife and mother someday.

She must be an example to her children and the pride of her husband.

I will help her to be as pure and decent as I want my wife to be.

Manhood means strength of character as well as body.

Lack of self-control is a sign of weakness. I want my girlfriend to know that I am manly.

God is everywhere, sees everything, knows everything.

Darkness may hide me from people, but it cannot hide me from God.

-- (Author Unknown), Dear Abby, 3-18-93

I think that now would be a good time to insert a word about grace. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. This does not mean that we therefore take a flippant attitude toward sexual sin, but it does mean that we can repent and turn to the Lord Jesus and be pure again in His sight. In Christ we can become a new creation. When you come up out of the waters of baptism washed pure and clean by the blood of Jesus and you can live a pure life from this day forward regardless of your past impurity. Does this sound like a deal for you? I urge you to accept it.

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# Problem of Marriage by Mike Jeffress

Genesis 2: 4-2: 25

Marriage 101–Lesson 4  
The Problem of Marriage  
Mike Jeffress, Nacogdoches, Texas

## Reasons for Divorce

A man in Tarriville, Connecticut, filed for divorce because his wife left him a note on the refrigerator which read: "I have gone to the bridge club. There'll be a recipe for your dinner at 7 o'clock on Channel 2."

A man in Hazard, Kentucky, divorced his wife because she "beat him whenever he removed onions from his hamburger without asking for permission."

A deaf man in Bennettsville, South Carolina, filed for divorce because his wife "was always nagging him in sign language."

A woman in Canon City, Colorado, divorced her husband because he forced her to "duck under the dashboard whenever they drove past his girlfriend's house."  
A woman in Hardwick, Georgia, divorced her husband on the grounds that he "stayed home too much and was much too affectionate."  
(<http://microsquish.com/funstuff/201/reasonfordivorce.html>)

## Review:

1. The Preparation for Marriage
2. The Provision for Marriage
3. The Purity of Marriage
4. The Problem of Marriage

–Soon after the honeymoon, Satan visits (Gen. 3: 1-6).

–Why does Satan want to attack marriages?

1. Satan wants us to disobey God.

Satan's goal in life is for you and me to reject God's will for our lives and this includes God's will for marriage. God's will for marriage is that a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and for the two to become one. God's will is that what He has joined together no man should separate. God's will is that marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure. God's will is for a wives to be subject to their own husbands as to the Lord and for men to love their own wives as Christ loved the church and to nurture and cherish their wives as their own flesh.

2. Satan wants to destroy love.

Love is one of the greatest gifts God has given us. Jesus died on the cross to demonstrate God's love for us. Paul said Christ's love compels us. And without love as the motivation no act of service no matter how sacrificial is unprofitable. Indeed,

love is the supreme spiritual gift and the greatest command. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are.... Therefore if Satan wants us to disobey God, then his top priority has to be to destroy our love, because love is the chief of God's commands.

Therefore, Satan wants to attack any relationship in which love can be nurtured.

3. Satan wants to deliver misery.

Prov 21:9 (NIV) Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Prov 21:19 (NIV) Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

Prov 25:24 (NIV) Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Prov 27:15 (NIV) A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day

1Sam 25:3 (NIV) His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

(Tell story)

1Sam 25:25 (NIV) May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent.

4. Satan wants to discredit our witness.

Jesus said a house divided against itself cannot stand. How much more so is it true that a house divided against itself cannot be light, salt, and leaven to the world. We are called to be "blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation" so that we can "shine like stars in the universe" (Phil. 2:15).

—So how can we defeat the Devil?

1. Draw near to God through repentance and forgiveness

The Bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (Jas. 4:7-8). And one of the most certain ways to resist the devil and draw near to God is through repentance and receiving forgiveness. And what works in our relationship with God works in our marriages. When a problem arises in your marriage, you can know that at the root of the problem is sin. Too many times we blame each other, when the real culprit is sin. If we can step back and identify the sin. Maybe it's selfishness. Maybe it's a lack of self-control. Repent of the sin. If you are the offended party, forgive the sin. In a marriage relationship where you take one sinner and unite him with another sinner, repentance and forgiveness is absolutely essential. I will go so far as to say your ability to remain happily married will be in direct proportion to your willingness to repent of your sins. Sins such as selfishness, envy, anger; sins of lying and breaking faith. Your ability to stay happily married will be in direct proportion to your willingness to repent and to

forgive.

2. Dress up in the whole armor of God.

Belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, sword of salvation.

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# Help! Where are the Instructions? By Brian Kelly

Genesis 2: 18-25

## Introduction

This morning we are beginning a new sermon series that will take us through the next ten weeks.

Want to welcome those of you who may be joining us for the first time for this service. It is an honor to have you here. We want to do everything we can to make your time with us meaningful and enjoyable. So if there is anything at all you need, please don't hesitate to speak to anyone wearing one of these nametags.

The series we're beginning today is entitled "Help for the Home." Over the next few weeks we want to look at a number of issues that affect the family.

Two things we know about family relationships:

1) All of us are affected by them. It doesn't matter if you are married or single, parent or child, family of origin or blended family—all of us at some level are involved and impacted by family relationships.

2) Family relationships are hard. They have been affected by the brokenness of our world. And while on one hand they can be incredibly wonderful, they can also be incredibly difficult.

It's interesting that in the book of Genesis the very first affect of sin in the world relates to family: Adam and Eve—one blames the other, they recognize their nakedness (vulnerability). Their relationship is affected. Then Cain and Abel.

Bottom line is this—in a fallen world it is tough to be a spouse. It is tough to be a child. It is tough to be a parent. And it is further compounded by the lack of good advice or models for doing family life well.

Don't get me wrong: the bookshelves are lined with books on the family.

And we certainly have lots of models to look to.

But are they the right models?

Is the information and instruction we read the right stuff?

For example, where do we learn the most about how to do family life well?

- We learn from our families of origin.
- Now, would all the people who grew up in a perfect family of origin please stand!
- All of us, no matter how good our families (and mine was wonderful), are the product family relationships that were fallen.
- And these relationships are our models, and we pass the brokenness down.

- That's why \_\_\_\_\_ says "the sins of the fathers will be visited to the third and fourth generations." We pass brokenness on.

And when it comes to books on the subject, guess what?

- All those books are written by fallen people.
- And while many contain incredible insight—I have benefited from several on the subject, they are still the product of people who are fallen. And while much of the advice can be great, some of it can be quite misguided.

So where do we turn for help?\_Where are the instructions?

This weekend I'd like to suggest that there are some good instructions out there for family life. There is "Help for the Home."

And that help is found in the Bible.If you think about it, it makes sense that the Bible would provide good instruction for us.\_You see, the Bible was written by God. He used people like me and you to write his truth. And that is the only thing that explains why a book so vast and complex can be consistently verified, consistently harmonizes, and perhaps above all works.

And understand, the objective data for the authenticity and authority of the Bible is overwhelming. It would take more effort to believe that the Bible is not true than to believe it is.

But, even if you don't accept the authenticity or authority of the Bible, you must agree that it's principles work!

When I live my life by it's standards life works best.

For example, it's interesting that so much of the sex education in schools is currently revolving around abstinence—that the only "safe-sex" is sex within marriage.

- Should we be surprised that the Bible has been saying this for over three millennia?
- The greatest proof of scripture's truthfulness is that it works!
- And the reason it works is because it was written by the author of life!
- You see, God created us. He created you and me and the world in which we live.
  - He created marriage.
  - He created family.
  - That's what the book of Genesis is all about.
  - And while there is much debate in both the Christian and secular community about the precise nature of the origin of the universe, such debate misses the point of Genesis.
  - The point is this: God created us!
- Because God created life, he knows best how life is to work.
  - Because God created marriage, he knows best how marriage is to work.
  - Because God created family, he knows best how marriage is to work.

- It's like a new software program—some of you probably got a new computer or PDA for Christmas. Perhaps you got a new program.
  - And you know how extensive the documentation for that device/program is.
  - Most of us don't read it all, we just jump in.
  - And if you got a new program, and used it for a year, you'd probably figure it out pretty well.
  - In fact, you could probably write a basic manual for it.
  - But even if you used that program for years—felt from experience you had it mastered, there is probably still something the programmer could teach you about it.
  - And you know how incredible it can be when you learn that one thing that you had no idea the program can do, and it is so significant it changes your life!
- Well, many of us have been at the marriage and family thing for a long time. We've got a lot of it figured out. But there's still something our creator can teach us.
- And we want to learn that in the course of this series, beginning today with God's first and most basic instruction about marriage, taken from the book of Genesis.
- Genesis tells us about creation. As we said earlier, the primary point God makes in the book of Genesis is often overlooked in the debate about the nature and timing of the creation.
- The overwhelming, undeniable, un-debatable point the book of Genesis serves to teach us is that it all begins with God.
- And in the book, particularly the first two chapters, we are given incredible insight into the nature of our lives and the nature of our relationships.
- And it's a shame that we so try to ask of the book questions it was not intended to answer that we overlook the incredible data it gives us about who we were made to be and how we were meant to live.
- In fact, the gospel loses much of its impact if we fail to recognize the creation order to which the gospel restores us.
- In Genesis, we learn about the origin of marriage, and this is what we read.

Read Genesis 2:18-25

Pray—We always pray before we work through a particular text because we believe the Bible is God's word, and we need his help to understand it. So we ask God to help us speak about and understand his word correctly.

- Adam is alone. It is not good. It is the only thing that isn't.
- What's the point of this: People were created for community.
  - We were designed for relationships.
  - Our lives don't work right in isolation.
- So God creates Eve, and in so doing establishes the most foundational relationship to all creation: marriage.
  - All other relationships will flow from it.
  - Without marriage, there would not be family.

- Without procreation through marriage, there would be no one to befriend us.
- In the creation order all community flows from marriage.
- Should we be concerned about the devaluing of marriage in our culture? Yes we should, because marriage is the foundational relationship in society from which all other community flows.
- After recording this event, the author of Genesis makes a comment about it. The comment is found in verse 24.
  - This passage will be referenced by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament as the foundational passage on marriage.
  - The passage tells us three things;
- One: Marriage Requires Leaving
  - Leaving what?
  - Genesis 2:24 says “father and mother.”
  - But it’s interesting that the actual practice within Jewish culture was that the bride and groom would live with his family.
  - What, then does this statement mean, because there was not a physical leaving of mom and dad by the husband—and all you wives are saying “I’m sure glad that has changed!
  - The word for “leave” has more the sense of “forsake” or “re-prioritize.”
    - In ancient near-eastern culture, the primary responsibility of any child, and particularly a son, was to his parents.
    - This custom was codified in the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and mother.”
    - Before marriage, a son’s primary responsibility, allegiance and priority was to his mother and father.
  - But Genesis tells us all this changes at marriage. The priority of the relationship to mom and dad changes, and now there is a new priority: the spouse.
  - Parental priority and obligation is left, and a new priority is embraced—the spouse.
  - Many marriages today are less than fulfilling and many fail because one spouse or the other has failed to leave.
    - Some of us have failed to leave family.
      - We don’t live with them, but they still occupy an unhealthy priority in our lives.
      - And we know in our hearts that if we had to choose between our family of birth and our spouse, on some issues we would choose our family of birth.
      - We have not left, and our marriage will not work that way.
      - I have three children. Someday, if God so chooses, they will marry. And I’ve already prepared the speech I will give them on that day: Whenever a choice has to be made between me and your mother or your siblings and your spouse, you must always choose your spouse.
    - Some of us have failed to leave other priorities.
      - Work—when there is a choice, work wins.
      - Hobbies—are interests are of higher priority than our spouse.
      - Friends—we’d rather be with them.

- Children—Some of us could make the greatest single improvement in our families by saying to our children whenever there is a choice between you and your mom or dad, you will lose.
      - When Genesis says marriage requires leaving, it is telling us that there is a shift of priorities that takes place when we enter this covenant.
      - All other priorities are left behind or forsaken, in order that our spouse might become the highest priority in our lives!
- Marriage Requires Joining or “Cleaving”
  - The reason we leave is so we can cleave.
  - We give up in order to get.
  - We reorder our priorities for a greater priority.
  - And it is a relationship in which, with God’s help and by his standards we can experience a level of community that was unknown to us before.
  - And the way we cleave is through love.
  - Now the Bible will teach us two things about love:
    - Love is a passion or emotion.
    - Love is a choice.
  - That love is a passion from the bible’s perspective is clear. Read the Song of Solomon. That love involves passionate is evident. You won’t believe some of that stuff is in there.
    - And our culture clearly affirms this.
    - Many of the songs, movies, television shows we hear and see every day affirm this reality.
    - Among the new country and western songs you might want to listen to remind yourself of this reality are .
  - But the Bible will also teach us that love is a choice—an action or a decision.
    - And our culture rarely speaks about this.
    - That love is truly love when action precedes the passion!
    - Think of it this way: What is the greatest example of love in all of history? Christ’s death for us.
    - How passionate do you think Christ felt as he was hanging on the cross for us?
    - Love is demonstrated in action and choice.
    - That was Paul’s point when he said in 1 Corinthians 13 “love is patient, kind, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, etc.”
  - For some of us the passion left our marriage a long time ago.
    - We’ve told ourselves we are no longer in love.
    - Please understand we are no longer in love only when we choose to stop loving.
    - Forget, for the moment, about how you feel. Make the choice, the decision, to love. And watch.
    - The passion will follow the choice. The feelings will follow on the heels of the action.
  - And the great reversal of this in our culture—the notion that I will only act lovingly when I feel lovingly, has led to the needless end of far too many marriages in our culture.
  - Marriage requires “Cleaving.” And we cleave by choosing to love—when we feel like it, and when we don’t.

- Marriage Results in Becoming One
  - A final aspect of Genesis teaching on marriage is that marriage results in a new creation.
  - When two people make the choice to leave and the choice to cleave, God does a new work: He creates one out of two.
  - The continued creative activity of God is witnessed every time you attend a wedding—it's an incredible thing.
  - We saw it two weeks ago right here on Saturday night—God created right in our midst.
  - There is now a oneness that did not exist before. There is a relationship where, before the Fall, total authenticity was possible. That's what verse 25 (they were naked) is all about.
  - Two very important things we need to know about this:
    - First, there is a progression.
      - The end of v. 24 and v. 25 certainly have sexual overtones.
      - Our sexuality becomes the physical expression of this new oneness.
      - But we live in a sexually confused culture.
      - Is sex only for marriage? Is it only for a relationship between a man and a woman. Our culture would suggest not.
      - But, note the context and the order:
        - The context: man and woman
        - The order: leave, cleave, become one.
      - A person leaves, cleaves and then becomes one.
      - Sex only has meaning, significance and sanctity when one has made the commitment to leave and cleave.
      - When follows that order and is in the context of a man and woman.
      - And that context and order has only one means of expression: marriage.
      - So if you're wondering if sex is okay outside of marriage, it is not.
      - It is not part of the creation design or order and God will not bless it.
      - 
      - Don't fool yourself into thinking you've left and "cleft" but you are not married—you haven't.
      - Because whatever reason you give for not being married is evidence that you have not left.
      - And if you're involved in that, don't feel like we're beating up on you or that God is going to strike you with lightning when you leave. Just realize that your life will not know the joy, blessing and fulfillment of God if continue to operate apart from his plan and commit to bringing your life under his plan.
    - Second, it is Satan's goal to destroy God's creation—and that includes your marriage.
      - We should not be surprised that marriage is hard—all of Hell is marshaled against it.
      - And Hell is against your marriage because Satan knows it is the most foundational relationship in all creation.

- Destroy marriage, and the creation order crumbles.
- That means you must take your marriage very seriously.
- Because if you are married the key to Satan unraveling your life is his ability to unravel your home.
- Listen to me: Husband, Wife, Mom, Dad, Parent, Child, Brother, Sister—Marriage and family relationships are incredibly important—The whole creation order hangs on their success and their preservation is far more than a matter of convenience!
- And forgiveness and truth are the greatest weapons to preserving that oneness.

Conclusion:

- So, let's all take this topic seriously.
- Let's assess our marriages by this biblical instruction.
- Where we've departed from it, let's repent and re-align.
- And let's experience together all the joy God wants our marriage and family to provide.
- Because, remember, he created it.
- And he designed it to be a good thing!

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# Help! I Married the Wrong Person by Brian Kelly

Ephesians 5:21-33

## Introduction

- Begin with drama of bride and groom loaded down with baggage, each thinking the other will meet their specific needs.
  - If each of us were able to be completely honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that many of us entered our marriages with the same expectations and hopes the individuals in this drama had.
  - We all come to the altar as people with very real needs.
  - And often, whether consciously or subconsciously, we envision those needs being met in our spouse to be.
  - Why do you think so often people marry individuals who are their opposite in terms of personality and style?
  - It's because we see in that person who is our opposite the opportunity to have needs, weaknesses, inadequacies in our life fulfilled.
    - For example: Tavia and I
  - But, the reality is, our needs are never fully met or fulfilled in our spouse.
  - We never fully get what we need from them.
  - And often this will lead us to the conclusion that we have married the wrong person.
  
  - This weekend I want to speak to those of us who feel that way.
  - This message is directed at those of us here who, when honest about our marriages would say, "My needs are really not being met in this relationship." "My spouse is not for me the person I need them to be." "I think I would be happier with someone else."
  - Does the Bible offer any help for those of us contemplating this reality.
  
  - Pray
  
  - When we look at the Biblical data, there are three myths about relationships in general and marriage in particular that are dispelled. When we see through these myths, we are free to find fulfillment in a marriage that may seem less than fulfilling.
- I. Myth 1: My Spouse Can Meet my Needs
- A. All of us have very real emotional and relational needs.
    1. These needs were established at creation.
    2. "It is not good that man is alone."
    3. Built into who we are are internal needs that can only find fulfillment in relationship with other people.
  - B. These needs can be summarized in two words:
    1. Security—we need to feel loved with an unconditional love—a love that is not dependent on who we are or what we do.
    2. Significance—we need to feel like we matter—that we are important to someone.

- These needs are not bad.
- They are not a sign of weakness—they are a sign of our humanness built in by our creator.
- I as a person am only fully alive when I feel significant and secure.
- And before the Fall, Adam and Eve met these needs for each other.
- Part of the “oneness” they experienced was this completion or fulfillment of their individual needs for security and significance.
- But the Fall occurred. And the Fall brought with it the inability of any person to fully meet the needs of another.
- Two broken people could not be what they needed to be for each other.
- I was no good at math. I never took calculus. Adam and Eve trying to have their needs met in each other would be like me trying to teach you calculus. I couldn’t do it.
- Nor could Adam and Eve fully meet each other’s needs, nor can your spouse fully meet your needs.
- Can you imagine what this would have been like for Adam and Eve—to have experienced their needs being met, then not being met after the Fall.
- Now don’t get me wrong. Our spouses can go a long way in helping us experience the security and significance we long for.
- But the writer of Psalm 62: 1-2 will state it clearly like this: “My soul finds rest in God alone.”
- The reality of life in a fallen world is this: There is only one person who can fully meet my needs, and it is God himself.
- God alone is able to satisfy the deepest longing of my soul—a need for security and significance.
- And I experience fulfillment in these areas to the degree that I pursue and deepen my relationship with him.
- Security becomes experienced as I realize the reality of God’s love in my life—that as Paul says in Romans 8: 38 “Nothing can separate me from.”
- And my significance is demonstrated in the reality that Jesus died for me—that as Jesus taught in Luke 15 I was the one who was lost and he came looking for.
- Now this is the truth about our existence and we must understand and affirm this truth if we are able to embrace a biblical approach to marriage.
- Myth 1: My spouse cannot meet my needs. They can only be met in God.

#### Myth 2: Marriage is about Me

- None of us would admit to basing our marriages on this assumption, but all of us at some level believe it.
- All of us, at some level, if we are honest with ourselves, approach our marriages from the perspective of having my needs met.
- And much of our relationship centers around attempting to manipulate our spouse to fulfill our needs.

- Take this example: Tavia and I have very different perspectives on time. She grew up in Brasil—a culture that honors relationships above time commitments so to her, being on time is of very low importance.
- I grew up not only in a different culture, where time was given a high priority, but I grew up in a family where we were early for everything.
- Now, as you can imagine, this created quite an issue in our relationship.
- I remember the first time I went to Brasil before we were married. Sunday morning came. It was time to go to church. Church started at 9 a.m. At 9 a.m. we were still sitting around her parents house. I'm a mess. They're not concerned. Because nothing starts on time in Brazilian culture, and they are very okay with that.
- Now, let's psychoanalyze this for a minute:
  - My need to be on time, truthfully, is rooted in a deep emotional desire to have people think well of me—to be accepted as a responsible person—to be affirmed by others—at the core, this gets at my need for security.
  - My spouse does not naturally help me fulfill that need.
  - So what do I do—I attempt to manipulate here to be for me what I perceive I need.
- So, I would start saying things like, "Boy, this event starts in three hours, what time do you think we ought to leave."
- Or, "Wow, if you're going to do your hair your probably going to want to start to get ready in about an hour."
- Or not so subtly, "It's really important to me that we are on time for this so I need you to be ready to leave at 10:30.
- And in all of this what am I doing? I am manipulating my spouse in an attempt to meet my needs.
- And often, we do this so subtly, that we don't even realize it.
- But, when we are honest with ourselves, we see that much of what we are doing in our marriage is motivated by this believe that marriage is about me. Therefore it is appropriate for me to relate to my spouse in a way that will insure that my needs are met.
- Now somebody might be saying, hold on. I don't think that it is inappropriate to seek to have my needs fulfilled in marriage.
- I believe I am entitled to get something out of this deal.
- Certainly our culture would tell you that you are right.
- But, what does this Bible say about this?
- To get at that answer I would like us to look at perhaps one of the most grossly misinterpreted passages of all scripture:
- Ephesians 5:21-33.
- Most often, we begin this passage with verse 22 and we use this passage to teach on the submission of the wife to the husband's authority. Often, lamely, we try to justify our interpretation by saying that yes the wife is to submit, but the husband is called to love, and that is even more sacrificial or demanding than submitting.
- Such interpretation misses the clear teaching of the passage, which is established by verse 21, which gives us the key to interpreting not only the rest of chapter 5 but the beginning of chapter 6 as well.

- Ephesians is a great book to help us understand how to live our lives on the platform of Biblical truth.
- Ephesians doesn't address any specific problem within the church. It rather addresses the reality of our relationship in Christ.
- You'll remember from our study of this book a few years back that there are really two sections of the book.
  - Section one—chapters 1-3—a theological explanation of what we have in Jesus Christ.
  - Section two—chapters 4-6—what does it look like to live out what we have practically.
  - And guess what it all centers around? Relationships!
- So in chapters 5 and 6 Paul is going to talk about what it looks like to live in specific relationships based on who we are in Christ.
  - It's phenomenal teaching because Paul says based on the truth of who you are in Jesus Christ, this is what some very specific relationships in your life ought to look like.
  - And the theme that will govern all of them is stated in v. 21—mutual submission.
  - And the first relationship that is tackled is marriage.
- Now time will not allow us to fully explore this passage—but we can state the central point: **A husband's and wife's role in marriage centers around mutual submission or ministry to the other, not manipulation to have his or her needs met.**
- Marriage is about ministry!
- **It is about me submitting my desire to have my needs met in my spouse to the higher calling of ministering to my spouse.**
- This is what Ephesians 5:22-33 is all about, and the model cited is Christ—who surrenders his desires to the higher calling of giving himself for the church.
- Much can be said about the respective roles of loving and submitting, but the central point of the passage is marriage is about what I give to it, not about what I get from it.
- Now this is a radical departure from our culture's understanding, so let's make sure we fully understand what we've said so far.
  - I have very real needs for security and significance.
  - My spouse, because of their brokenness, cannot fully meet these needs.
  - These needs can be fully met as I develop and deepen my relationship with God.
  - As my needs are fulfilled in my relationship with God, I am freed to minister to my spouse because I am no longer seeking to manipulate them to meet my needs—I am freed to serve them in a way that meets their needs.
  - As I do this—serve my spouse—I find fulfillment. Why? Because this is the way God has designed marriage to work. **That my fulfillment in marriage comes not from what my spouse gives to me. It comes from what I give to them.** Are we okay with that?
- Marriage is not about me. Marriage is about ministry, not manipulation.

### Myth 3—I Can Only Love When I Feel “In Love.”

- Why is it easy to act lovingly toward each other during our courtship?

- It is because during our courtship there is often such a strong emotion of love that we would do anything for the one who is the object of that emotion.
- When Tavia and I were dating, I was so emotionally in love with her that I did some crazy things.
  - The first year we seriously dated, Tavia transferred to a college a couple miles away from the college we had initially attended together.
  - Guess where I spent my time—on Tavia's campus.
  - I was taking Greek at the time, and I was a pretty good student. Not that semester, though.
  - If there was a choice between sitting in my dorm room studying Greek or going to Tavia's apartment and studying her, what choice do you think I made?
  - Loving actions—spending time with Tavia—were very easy because of such a strong surge of loving emotion.
- Now, here's the reality: Any emotion, by definition, cannot be permanently sustained. Emotions fade. That is their nature.
  - Think about the last time you've experienced grief. I've experienced in my life and job some very intense times of grief—where I was incapacitated by the depth of my sorrow. I remember attending one funeral at the end of which I sobbed uncontrollably because of the depth of the emotion of grief I felt at that time.
  - Today, when I think about that situation, I still cognitively grieve, but I don't sob uncontrollably because the emotion of grief has faded.
  - Emotions fade—that is their nature. We would experience emotional overload if they didn't.
  - And guess what—the emotions you experienced when you first met your spouse will fade as well. That is a reality of our existence.
- The problem is that much of what we do in our marriages is based on emotion, not truth.
  - So as long as the emotion of love is there, we act lovingly.
  - But when the emotion is gone, we excuse ourselves from acting lovingly.
  - This is seen in a cultural reworking of the marriage vows a number of years ago to say "as long as we both shall love" instead of "as long as we both shall live."
  - The assumption here is that as long as we continue to feel the emotion of love we'll stay committed to each other. But should that feeling of love cease, we have an out.
  - Well, guess what, the feeling of love will always fade. And at the core, love is left standing as an action, not a feeling.
- That's what Paul was trying to get at in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.
  - These are actions, not feelings.
  - These are choices, not emotions.
  - **And I am capable of displaying these regardless of how I feel.**
- What is the proof of this: Christ.
  - Does Jesus want to go to the cross—no. In Gethsemane he expresses that.
  - Does he chose to act in love despite how he feels—yes. "But God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."
- And here is the incredible thing: When I choose to act lovingly, the feeling or the emotion will often follow.

- And it is a deeper, more real emotional experience than can be summed up in that initial “falling in love.”
- And I can really say that after almost 17 years of marriage, I feel more of an emotion of love toward Tavia than I ever felt.
- But that emotion follows the actions of love, it does not precede it.

#### Conclusion

- These are radical ideas—very different from our culture’s understanding of marriage.
- Marriage is about what I give, not what I get. I am in a unique position to minister to my spouse. No one else occupies that place or privilege. And in that sense, I cannot be married to the wrong person.
- Now please understand, I am not talking about abusive or seriously dysfunctional relationships where the nature of the covenant has been broken by one of the spouses.
- I am talking about the majority of our marriages here—where at times we wonder “Would I be better off with someone else.” And then answer to that question is no—not if you see marriage from its biblical perspective.
- Because from that perspective, with my needs fully met in Christ, I am uniquely positioned to fully give my self in service to another—to fully live out Christ’s model of love—and in so doing find a level of fulfillment that I may have never believed possible.

#### **My relationship with God is the key to a fulfilling marriage!**

- Now let me say this by way of conclusion:
  - I am not talking about abusive or clinically dysfunctional relationships—you need to see a counselor. Please call us.
  - This is not a quick fix—this is a lifetime process.
  - I can only do this when I live in an authentic relationship with God.
  - Give people opportunity to:
    - Establish—salvation prayer
    - Recommit—prayer of recommitment
- Pray

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# Help! I'm a Man – By Brian Kelly

Genesis 2:15-20

## Introduction

The further we get away from the creation ideal, the more confused we become about who we are. We try to figure ourselves out, but apart from input from the one who created us, we really can't arrive at sound conclusions.

Over the next two weeks we're going to look at gender issues—what does it mean to be a man and what does it mean to be a woman.

This weekend we want to look at issues related to manhood.

- Gender confusion—we live in a culture that sends us confusing messages about what it means to be a man or a woman. That confusion often arises from the fact that God is not seen as our ultimate reference point. That's why Genesis 1 and 2 are so important.
- God creates distinct but equal—in Genesis 1 and 2 we see a key reality about men and women—God creates them distinct but equal.
  - The church has often denied the equality of men and women. Yet one must agree that in the creation ideal—they are equal.
    - Both created in the image of God (“male and female he created them”)—this is our sole basis of value.
    - The two become one in marriage—how much more equal could you get.
  - Culture has often denied (in an attempt to correct inequality) the distinction. Men and women are different.
    - Different in design.
    - Different in path to fulfillment
- This weekend, we want to try to recapture what it means biblically to be a man. We'll do this by looking at the creation ideal, the impact of the fall, and current realities.
- Passion for me not because I'm the model, but because I see over and over the damage done when men are not men.
- Books.

Read Genesis 2:15-20

## The Creation Ideal

Active, not Passive

- The garden was there for Adam to work, not just sit back and enjoy.
- Responsible.
- Take initiative.
- He would find fulfillment in work.
- He would bring order to it.
- He would create as did his creator.
- It's a garden—the nature of caring for it is that it will produce.
- Why do men like woodshops and garages?

### Guardians of Truth

- The guardian of the command.
- The communicator of the command.
- Adam is called to live in relationship to truth.
- This will define and bring meaning to his life.
- Why men are at their best fighting for an ideal—Braveheart or John Wayne

### Bring Order Out of Chaos

- Name the animals.
- To name is to define character in Eastern culture.
- Adam is called to bring certainty to that which was uncertain.
- Why men like to cut down trees, clear land and mow their yards.

### Live in Relationships

- He's not to be an island.
- Living in isolation defies the created order.
- He is to relate to God and he is to relate to Eve.
- Why men are attracted to women—the most foundational of relationships.
- Why boys are so often relationally wounded—especially by relationships with their own fathers. Men are drawn to relationships.

### **The Fall—Is Eve to Blame?**

Read Genesis 3:1-7

### Passivity

- Adam was with Eve.
- He was silent.
- A moment that called for his stewardship and intervention.
- He stayed passive.

### Abandons Truth

- Why doesn't Adam remind Eve of the command?
- Why doesn't he stop her?

### He Does Not Define Chaos

- He named the snake!
- He knew its nature.
- Perhaps Eve did not.

### He Moves Away From Relationship

- He allows Eve to act on her own.
- Then he blames and moves farther from her.
- They are now aware of the differences between them.

### **The Present Reality**

All of us as men are sons of Adam. We have inherited both his creation design and his fallen nature. This creates a great tension within us from which we long to escape.

### **Active not Passive**

- We were created to be active, not passive, but passivity pulls at us.
- Something in our nature says we should be involved—should be doing something, yet our passivity pulls us toward the TV.
- And we escape our call yet the tension builds inside of us.
- And our families and communities are denied what we were created to bring them.
- YOU WERE TO CREATE IN YOUR FAMILY LIFE!
- A LOT OF OUR FAMILIES SIT STAGNANT BECAUSE WE WON'T ACT.

### **Guardians of Truth**

- Designed to live in allegiance and relationship to God.
- Religion is seen as a “woman thing.”
- Men were designed to be the spiritual leaders of their homes.
- We have abandoned that ideal.
- Family suffers.
- OUR CHILDREN LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD FROM CHURCH THAN THEY DO FROM US—SETTING A MODEL AS MEN WHO PASSIONATELY PURSUE GOD.
- I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW—IT'S WHAT YOU DO—ARE YOU PASSIONATELY PURSUING GOD—ARE YOU A JOSHUA?

### **Orderers of Chaos**

- Men were to step into the uncertainty.
- They were to define the chaos.
- Yet in fear we retreat.
- Just do something.
- START NAMING THINGS. SPEAK INTO THE CHAOS. HAVE THE ANATOMICAL NECESSITIES TO LEAD IN THE MESS OF FAMILY LIFE!

### **Relators**

- You were designed for this.
- Relate to God—ARE YOU PASSIONATELY PURSUING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?
- Relate to your wife—WOULD YOUR CHILDREN SAY YOU LOVE YOUR WIFE?
- Relate to your children—DO YOU SPEND TIME, DO YOU LISTEN?
- Relate to others—WILL YOUR FAMILY KNOW THEY WERE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY FROM THE EXAMPLE YOU SET?

### **Conclusion**

- What happens when you violate the creation ideal?
- Generations suffer.
- Men stand—women pray.

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# Help! I'm a Woman! - By Brian Kelly

Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:18-24; Genesis 3:20

## Introduction

- Drama
- Can anyone here relate to that drama?
- Speaking as an outsider—a man—it would seem the pressure and expectations that are often placed on women by our culture and our families could lead to such a scene.
- As we said last week, we live in a culture in which there is much confusion over gender—What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a woman?
- Last weekend we talked about men. Today we want to talk about what it means to be a woman from a Biblical perspective.
- Going into this discussion, we need to establish two things—as we did last weekend:
  - What will be our source of authority?
  - What framework does that authority give us to understand the sexes?
- Our authority will be the scriptures—particularly the creation order. You can't make sense of humanity, life or the world (or redemption) apart from understanding the creation order.
- The framework is equal but distinct.
  - Pre-fall, men and women are created equal (image of God, becoming one).
  - But they are different—from how they are created to what they look like.
- This distinction is okay. In fact God said it's good. I would say it's great. I'm personally very grateful my wife doesn't look like a man!
- But we need to say the distinction has often led to a perceived inequality—even or especially in the church.
  - This is not a proper understanding of the creation order.
  - When we turn the distinction into inequality, we are wrong.
  - When we eliminate the distinction to promote equality we are wrong.
  - Men and women are equal, but distinct.
- If you're a man or a woman with an ax to grind, you will misinterpret much.
- We talked last week about male distinctions. What are the female distinctions we learn about from the creation order?
  
- This is where things get a little uncomfortable for me.
- I can explain the text.
- I can articulate the theology.
- But I have very little understanding about how it applies, because I'm not a woman.
- So I've asked for some help today.
- Over the past twelve years, as I've had the great honor an privilege to lead this church, I've also had the humbling privilege of receiving many of the accolades. I've been the one who has gotten to stand in the spotlight.

- But there is a person who has been equally responsible for what God has done in this place, and rarely does she receive accolades or get to stand in the spotlight.
- And yet 12 years ago I asked her to make a decision to leave her family and her past—growing up in a metropolitan center of Brasil, two degrees off the equator, and come to this little crossroads of NW Pennsylvania called McLane because God had planted a vision in our hearts for this place.
- And she came gladly. And over the past 12 years, it has often been her that has kept the vision alive when I have let it wane.
- She is passionate about the church. She is my equal in every way.
- That person is my wife of 17 years, Tavia.
- Tonight I've asked here to help me illustrate some of these biblical principles from her own life and experience.
- And you would give me the greatest honor if you would welcome and honor her for the behind the scenes role she has played in the leadership of this church.

Now, as we did last week, we're going to be looking at the creation order—the creation ideal.

And I'm indebted for some of these observations to a woman named Barbara Mouser, who in 2002 published a study course entitled *Five Aspects of Woman, a Biblical Theology of Femininity*.

The principle points were going to make this evening come from her outline.

What we'd like to do is this. I'll explain the text and the theological point that derives from it, then I'll ask Tavia to talk specifically how this point has applied to her life.

Pray

### **Genesis 1:26-28**

- Men and women created equally in the image of God.
- Men and women created equally to rule.
- This is where the dominion principle of creation is established.
- Why is it that people have a right to take dominion over creation?
- Because of the creation order.
- People are given permission to fill, subdue and rule.
- This is why it is okay to cut down trees to build houses and kill animals for food—because of the dominion principle.
- Let me quickly say, this is not permission to exploit or abuse—that cannot be justified.
- But clearly the case is made for people to rule.
- And the mandate is given to both men and women.
- Mouser expresses this dominion principle as woman is created to be "Mistress of the Domain."
- She is not created as a decoration for creation who is to be made to sit passively as the creation unfolds.

- No, she like the man, is given the commission to fill, subdue and rule. God says this to them. Those who would argue the subservience of women to men in culture and society do not take seriously this text.
- The woman is to be a co-regent. She is given dominion and authority.

### Genesis 2:18-24

- Woman is created in response to a deficiency.
  - It is not good that Adam is alone. The creation order is not right.
  - She is created to be a helper and completer.
  - There is something she will bring to the creation order that Adam can't bring it.
  - She is distinct.
  - She is different.
  - She is not like the man.
  - There is something she brings to the creation that is missing without her.
- 
- What she brings to the creation is a relational reality.
  - She is created out of a relational deficit.
  - It is no mistake that women tend to be more relational than men.
  - In her creation she was designed to relate. This is a good thing.
  - She was created from a person for people. Adam was created from earth for earth.
  - She's created in the garden, not outside of it. There is a refinement to her.
  - There is a refinement her focus on people will bring to the created order—i.e. Tombstone—Kurt Russell is going to tame the frontier and Dana Delaney is going to bring culture to it.
  - Relationships will largely be the playing field on which women exercise the creation ideal.

### Genesis 3:20

- Eve becomes the mother of all the living.
- She is the life-giver.
- She will be the life giver to human victory over Satan—the Messiah.
- This is far more than physical life.
- While many women will bare children and biologically bring forth life, this principle extends far beyond having children.
- Women are given the ability to breathe life into creation on a level that men are not.
- **Women have a created capacity to give life, nurture, heal, comfort, encourage and make alive.**
  - **Why do the kids want mom when they're sick?**
  - **Why when they're feeling down do they want mom?**

### Conclusion

Two points of application:

- Men—a deep appreciation—not a condescending attitude, but mutual appreciation of what God has created.
- Women—seize and fulfill what was placed in you at the creation.
  - Rule your domain.
  - Function as a completer to the creation.

- Recognize your great power and responsibility as a life giver.

Close with video of woman of faith.

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# Help! I'm a Single Parent - by Brian Kelly

Genesis 21:14-21

## Introduction

- If you are a single parent, you are the hero in the room tonight/today.
- You face an enormous task single-handedly.
- And yet as the drama reveals, your impact in the life of your children is profound.
  
- Tonight/today we are continuing with our "Help for the Home" sermon series.
- In the course of this series we are examining critical issues about family life.
- We are asking what does the Bible offer us for help in these issues that face us all.
- Tonight/today we want to ask "What help does the Bible offer to the single parent.
  
- As single parents, you face what is seemingly the impossible task.
- Parenting, by design, was a two-person job.
- As we've studied the creation order during this series, we've seen that it was not good that Adam was alone.
- And it was out of this community that children came and were reared.
- This was the creation ideal.
  
- But guess what, we live in a world where sometimes, the ideal is not realized.
- Just as we saw when we looked at marriage that sometimes the ideal for permanence is not realized, so also when we look at the ideal for parenting as a two person job we must conclude that in a broken, fallen world, this ideal is also sometimes lost.
- Some of us are here tonight as single parents because of the death of a spouse or divorce or just a bad decision and we find ourselves experiencing life outside of the ideal.
  
- And it might be easy for us to think in our situation that God doesn't care.
- Or to think we are getting what we deserve.
- Or to feel abandoned and without hope.
  
- Such is not the case.
  
- I am not a single parent.
- I cannot speak from my own experience.
- I can, however, speak about the realities and truths the scriptures affirm.
- And I can share with you what one single parent, whom I respect profoundly both for her parenting and her faith, has shared with me about how she found hope and help in the midst of this challenge.

## God's Perspective on Single Parents

- I want to set the stage tonight by talking about God's perspective—God's view of the single parent.

- Because the creation ideal is a two parent family, it would be easy to conclude that God is against the single parent.
- That somehow single parents represent a sub-standard grade of parents in God's economy.
- Or that God's heart is not quite as big for single parent as it is for families of two parents.
- 
- Yet when we look at the Biblical data, such is not the case.
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- When one looks at the OT and NT recorder, it is impossible to walk away with any other conclusion than that God cares deeply for single parents.
- In fact, one could perhaps even make the argument that God cares even more deeply for those who face this enormous challenge.
- Consider the evidence:
- Very early on in the Biblical record we encounter a single parent. It is Hagar. Abraham has fathered a child by Hagar—properly speaking a child born out-of-wedlock, an illegitimate child.
- Sarah, Abraham's wife, in her jealousy compels Abraham to send Hagar and her son, Ishmael, away.
- In ancient near-eastern culture, this is a death sentence.
- A single mom with an illegitimate child had little hope for survival.
- And at the deepest part of desperation in the story, we read this.
- 
- Genesis 21:14-21
- 
- What do we see:
  - God's care—he sees her plight and is concerned.
  - God's provision—he provides miraculously for her needs.
  - God's promise—he promises a redemptive future for this child.
- And I think it no accident that this story occurs so early in the Biblical record—as if God from the start wants to communicate his heart for and commitment to the single parent and their children.
- 
- Such thought is further expressed in Deuteronomy 24:19-22.
- Here in Israel's early legislation provision is made for God's people to specially care for the fatherless and the widow—single parent families.
- Revealing again what—God's heart for those who face this challenge.
- 
- And in a very touching story from the NT, we read of Jesus heart in Luke 7:11-17:
- I'm perhaps taking some interpretive license here, but I believe the reason Jesus' "heart went out" to this widow was precisely because she was a single parent.
- Jesus didn't heal everyone, raise every dead person or come to everyone's aid.
- But he did come to the aid of this single parent? Why? Could it be because in doing so he revealed God's heart for those who face such challenge?
- 
- If you are a single parent here tonight/today, and if you here nothing else, please hear this:
- Regardless of how you came to be a single parent—tragedy, wrong choices, circumstances beyond your control—regardless of how you came to be where

- you are, on the authority of scripture I tell you God cares deeply for you and is radically committed to providing for your needs.
- And that is more than just a nice sentiment or some out-there hope. That is concrete reality on which you can build your life.
  - How do I know this?
  - Let me tell you.
  - 
  - A couple of years ago Tavia and I had the privilege of meeting through our small group a single parent. Her name is Anna.
  - Through our small group we've come to know her well and love her deeply.
  - And she has taught us much about what it means to face the challenges of raising a family alone.
  - 
  - Six years ago, Anna's husband died.
  - At that time, she had a son who was thirteen months old, and she was four months pregnant with her second child.
  - Almost overnight, Anna went from having the ideal family life to managing the reality of career, home and raising two boys all by herself.
  - 
  - In preparation for this message, I spent some significant time with Anna, asking her what she would say to single parents if she had the opportunity.
  - This is what she told me.

#### What would you say to single parents?

- The first thing she said is I would tell them you will experience hopelessness, overwhelmedness, fear, a sense of failure and the feeling that you are drowning (Anna's spiritual gift is not encouragement!)
  - These are the realities you will encounter.
  - There is no escaping them
  - It is one of the bad deals of life in a fallen world.
  - Anna said I would want single parents to know that.
- Then she said something very profound. She said you can accept these things as your lot in life, or you can pursue God with all your heart.
  - Anna said, without God, the above will be your lot.
  - A deep and vital relationship with God is your only hope.
- Now I really pressed Anna on this. Because while part of me was saying "what great advice," another part of me was saying, is this all?
- Isn't that a pretty simplistic answer to an overwhelming challenge?
- Anna went on:
  - She said at the time her husband died, she did not even consider herself a Christian.
  - She said her life revolved around herself.
  - She rarely thought of God.
  - In fact, she felt she had no need for God—her life seemed picture perfect.
  - A good marriage, a growing family, a happy home.
  - When she found herself suddenly a single parent, her thoughts of God were first only anger.
  - Why did God allow this to happen.
  - But God kept drawing Anna to himself.
  - And she described the point at which she finally cried out in desperation to him, abandoning herself totally to his purpose and care,

and in the time we spent together she over and over again said this has made all the difference.

- Anna, with a great intensity and passion spoke clearly that the answer was God.
- 
- And she said something else.
- She said I would tell them with God's help, you can make it.
- She said don't give up. Don't give up on yourself or your kids.
- With God's help, you can make it.
- 
- And you know what, Anna affirmed in reality the biblical truth stated by the Psalmist in Psalm 10:14:

Well, with such an opportunity, I was eager to ask "Anna, what would you say to the church?" "What does the church need to know about single parents." And Anna's answers were equally powerful and profound.

- She said the first thing I would want the church to know is that single parents need practical help.
  - They need someone to pick up the kids from school, drive them to soccer practice, watch them for the evening, etc.
  - She said don't say if you need help, call. Single parents often deal with guilt that will keep them from calling.
  - She said the most help came from people who said "I'm going to take your kids" or "I'm coming over to help." Single parents need practical help.
- Second, she said "Don't run away from the messiness." The life of a single parent family is often not neat. Many times there are relational dynamics, custody issues or emotionally charged situations that we may want to run from. Don't.
- Third, Anna said "be persistent and pushy." Just do it, even if they tell you they don't need help.
- 
- Then Anna said something profound, that relates to all of us here. She said there are seasons of life.
  - If it is your season to take--take.
  - If it is your season to give—give
- 
- And Jesus called the church to give to those in need—particularly single parent and their children.
- That's why James would write this: James 1:27
  - Why is this all James mentions? Because if you're doing this, your focus and priorities are such that you'll be doing the right things in every other area of your life as well.

#### Conclusion

- If a single parent—seek God with all your heart—entrust your life to him. Get involved in a group!
- If not—realize God's heart for and our responsibility to single parents. Especially challenge small groups to take action.
- Single parent's forum—Saturday, April 3, 6 p.m.

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