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Series: *Building Up the Family*

Title: *"How to Nurture a Marriage"*

Text: Genesis 2:18; 21-24

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Genesis 2:18; 21-24

**18 - The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**

**21 – 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.**

**23 – 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.**

Four months ago, I was privileged to be a part of the wedding of Danielle Day and Bryan Lockwood. As most of you know, Danielle is the youngest child of C.C. and Cheryl Day. One down---two to go! Bryan and Danielle said their vows on the roof of the Vis Arts Center in Rockville, MD. God blessed them with good weather that May afternoon---it was a little hot, but a gentle wind blew from time to time and there were blue skies filled with cotton candy clouds.

About 100 guests---family and friends---came, some traveling long distances to witness the ceremony. Many brought gifts. I saw a huge pile on a table next to the wall of the reception room. The groom and his men wore blue tuxes. The bridesmaids wore sage green dresses---The Bridal party looked amazing. My favorite though were Bryan's nephews---toddlers wearing their own tux outfits---pulled in a wagon---including child safety belts---all custom-built by their granddad. A violinist played beautifully as the wedding party, including those beautiful babies in that wagon, entered.

I did something a little different for Bryan and Danielle than I had done for other marriages. Borrowing an idea from the individual who did Becca and Andrew's pre-marital counseling, I had Bryan and Danielle write a purpose statement for their marriage---an explanation of what kind of marriage they believed God was calling them to build. And they did a great job on it---in fact, I used it as the basis for my homily because in it they said things like:

- *"We commit to CHOOSE to love each other every day."* And---
- *"We will seek God in all areas,"* and
- *"We will share God's love by giving to our local church and community."*

After the ceremony we all moved inside and downstairs to the reception room where tables and chairs had been set up---with flower arrangements in the middle. I got to sit with the Faulconers and the Michaels and the Robinsons and we had great fellowship as we enjoyed a sumptuous feast. During the meal there were toasts to Bryan and Danielle and the health of their marriage. There was a dance floor set up in the middle of the room and it was great seeing the family enjoy tripping the light fantastic---moms and dads dancing cheek to cheek---grandparents dancing with grandchildren---not to mention the bride's dance with her father. I'm pretty sure I saw C.C. shed a tear or two. I'm sure Cheryl did. Then there was the groom's dance with his mom---and of course the bride and groom's first dance as husband and wife.

Suffice it to say that it was a wonderful afternoon and evening---not unlike hundreds of other such evenings that I have been privileged to be a part of as a pastor---evenings that absolutely glow with family joy.

And, you know there's a lot of that "glowing" going on these days. Thousands and thousands of evenings much like that happen across our nation every year, because in our culture---weddings are a very big deal. This is in spite of the fact that the AVERAGE COST for a wedding including, venue, food, invitations dresses, tuxes, rings, rehearsal dinner, etc. is \$34,000 dollars---and that doesn't cover the cost of the honeymoon.

In spite of the cost, 6,200 weddings take place EVERY DAY in our nation. Even 80% of those who divorce decide to give it another shot and fork out all that cash as they marry again. I mean, it's obvious that in our culture people definitely believe in marriage. Why?

It's because inside we all long for companionship in life. It's how we are all wired. As God says in our text, ***"It is not good for man to be alone."*** and because it is not, God has made for man a ***"helper."*** Now, when we use this word, "helper," many people picture a sort of assistant---someone to simply wait on man hand and foot---but that's not the idea here. No, this word ***"helper"*** is much stronger than that. In fact, it's the same Hebrew word that is used to describe God Himself in Psalm 46:1 where it says, ***"God is our refuge and strength an ever-present HELP in time of trouble."*** Basically, this word for ***"helper"*** refers to someone who supplies what is lacking in another person. It tells us that God created Eve to do what Adam could not do by Himself and vice versa.

It's not that the man was better than the woman or woman better than man---but rather that each was and still is inadequate alone and as I said, inside we all know this. This is why everyday thousands of people take their vows and are pronounced man and wife. In spite of a sky-rocketing divorce rate most people still search for a "helper"---someone to share their lives with---someone to do for themselves what they can't.

Well, this morning as we continue our series on building great families, I want us to look at four basic principles that help nurture SUCCESSFUL, HEALTHY marriages---four principles that foster marriage relationships that are able to supply us with this inborn need we have for companionship. Here's the first:

### **1.) Both husband and wife to be committed for the LONG HAUL.**

In other words, spouses must agree that they are devoted to their relationship no matter what---UNTIL DEATH DO THEM PART.

Now, anyone who has been married for ten years or more will tell you that all marriage relationships go through phases in the first few years.

#### **A. The first phase could be referred to as the ROMANCE stage.**

During these first years or months---couples intensely FOCUS only on each other. They are spellbound---absorbed with each other. During this stage the tendency is to put your partner up on a pedestal. He or she can do no wrong. Spouses often wax poetic in this stage as an expression of their love for their spouse.

We find a good example of this in the 4th chapter of the Song of Solomon where the love-struck king describes his wife by saying: ***"How beautiful you are my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead!"*** (Song of Solomon 4:1)

Remember this is a middle eastern setting so these are complimentary phrases! He goes on, ***"Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance."*** (Song of Solomon 4:3-4)

Solomon continues to poetically describe her physical attributes, but you get the idea, so we'll stop at the neckline. But you can see that Solomon is definitely in the ROMANCE stage at this point. He is totally focused on his wife---and it's a focus that drives him to write poetry.

This stage is also characterized by INDULGENCE. There's a lot of giving IN and giving UP---a lot of ***"Whatever you want darling!"*** Couples GO along to GET along, catering to each other's whims. For example: wives can't stand sports but during the romance stage they go to football games with their husbands anyway. Husbands can't stand shopping, but they go to malls and outlets with their wives anyway.

And there's also a lot of IGNORANCE in this early stage of marriage because couples don't really know each other.

Now, this romance stage doesn't last long.

Soon couples DO get to know each other and come to realize that their partners actually have faults. They see how they look and smell in the morning. I mean, this romance stage is referred to as the IDEAL but when they get to know each other---the IDEAL turns into an ORDEAL---and at this point they enter the second stage known as:

### **B. The REALITY Stage.**

Once again Solomon gives us an example of this. In the text we read a moment ago Solomon was saying that his wife was perfect---flawless. Remember? But, then a little while later in Proverbs 27:15-16 he's changed his tune, saying this about his lovely wife with lips like a scarlet ribbon and a neck like the tower of David: ***"A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day. Restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."*** What happened? Rick Warren explains it this way, *"His delight turned to disillusionment. His dating to debating. His romance to resentment."*

At this point Solomon is like the man who went to his pastor complaining two months after his wedding saying, *"I got false advertising here."* The Pastor said, *"Hey, you took her for better or worse."* The man replied, *"Yeah, but she's a lot worse than I took her for."*

Now, ladies, please don't be offended. Just flop the man for the woman and this joke is still accurate.

Anyway, in this stage DULLNESS often sets in. Things are no longer exciting. Disagreements often turn the relationship into a marital cold war. Let me put it this way: What started as puppy love has gone to the dogs. Most marriages DO change at the beginning. They go from ROMANCE to REALITY---and shortly thereafter they enter the third stage:

### **C. The RETHINKING Stage.**

Let's put it this way.

- The Romance Stage is when we think of marriage as the perfect deal.
- The Reality Stage is where the ideal can turn into an ordeal.
- The Rethinking stage is when we want a NEW DEAL.

And at this point more and more couples do exactly that. They file for divorce and search for a "NEW DEAL." Well couples can get through these stages and even grow marriages that are better if they go into marriage with a mutual commitment that A NEW DEAL is not an option.

I say this for two reasons.

#### **A.) First, with this "long haul mind set" we are more likely to marry right in the FIRST PLACE.**

I mean, if you know it's for LIFE---no backsies---couples are much less likely to get married without due thought and consideration. If we know there's no turning back, we won't look at marriage trivially. We'll take it very seriously---and of course we should. As most pastors say at the beginning of a wedding ceremony, *"Marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly but seriously, reverently, and in the fear of the Lord."*

Here's a word picture to help you see the importance of this. Imagine what it would be like in America if the law was you could only own one car for the rest of your life.

- You could never trade it in for newer or better model.
- You could never junk it because it cost too much or breaks down too often.

If this were the law, wouldn't you be very careful in making this purchase? Of course, you would! And the same principle applies to marriage. When we recognize its permanence, we will be wiser when it comes to when and with whom we make that once-in-a-lifetime commitment.

Here's something else:

**B.) If a new deal is not an option we're more likely to try and make our marriages WORK.**

We realize, *"This is it. This is my one and only shot at this. I've got to make this marriage last."*

And that's good because to be good at marriage TAKES work----in fact it takes a lifetime of work. You see, to be good at marriage requires skill and to develop any skill takes time and practice. Someone one said, *"Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handspins, or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it."* And those are great analogies because marriage takes time and practice. It takes years of work for two different sinful beings to learn to work together.

My daughter Becca played on a Montgomery County rec basketball team for several years. I think it was from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade until 7<sup>th</sup> grade or something like that. Joe and Paula Pursell were her coaches every single year---working with the same basic group of girls. So, every Saturday morning for five years we went to watch Becca and her basketball pals play. And if you were to look at the way that group of girls played the first year and then compare it to the way they played the last year you'd be amazed at their improvement. By the end of all those years of training by Joe and Paula, their shots were more accurate---their dribbling and passing was more confident. They learned to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of other teammates and play as a team. Over the years this team learned the skills necessary to being good at playing basketball.

Well, it is the same in marriage. It takes time to get good at it. You don't become a good HELPER to your spouse overnight. But the longer and harder you work at it, the better---no, the more WONDERFUL it gets.

So, understand---couples who decide they want a NEW DEAL---couples who quit when things get tough---well, they never really experience GENUINE marital bliss because that kind of SOUL-STIRRING MARITAL JOY only comes to those who work to learn to GIVE it. You see, a strong marriage---a wonderful marriage---is not built on COMPATIBILITY as much as it is a COMMITMENT to a lasting relationship. One writer put it this way, *"A good marriage is not a gift which the bride and groom discover among the wedding presents. It's an achievement, a home-made, life-long, do-it-yourself project. It's built by two hearts and two pairs of hands, constantly working together at the task over a long period of time."*

This is one reason God has commanded in His Word, that, *"...what He has joined together, no man is to separate."* Our Heavenly Father did not issue that command to restrict us or to make us miserable. It's just that, as the Inventor of marriage, He knows that REAL love and fulfillment exist---ONLY in this atmosphere of "no-matter-what-I'm-not-giving-up-commitment that genuine love is deepened and takes root. Couples who give up and search for a new deal never discover this. It's like the miner who gives up digging when he's only six inches from hitting a vein of pure gold ore. To get to "marital gold" spouses have to be committed for the long haul.

And then, a second principle we must understand in order to nurture healthy marriages is this:

**2.) Spouses must seek to UNDERSTAND and EMBRACE each other's DIFFERENCES.**

And each man and woman IS different beyond the obvious physical differences---but as I inferred spouses don't usually realize HOW different they are until they get through the ROMANCE stage. At that point their eyes are opened, and they often say something like this,

*"Before we were married, we had so much in common and now that we are married, we have nothing in common."*

Of course, "nothing" is an exaggeration, but it is indeed interesting how often God seems to put exact opposites together. Here's some examples---and as I list them let's have no finger pointing or elbow jabbing!

- One spouse is an early riser. The other wants to hibernate until noon.
- One loves to talk---they have the gift of gab. The other is deaf and dumb.
- One is a people person. They love to be around groups of people. The other is more comfortable alone.
- One is always on time. The other is never on time.
- One loves to go out. The other hates that and is a real homebody.
- One is selfish---the other is selfless. Think of it who ELSE would marry a selfish person?

In his best-selling book Gary Chapman pointed out another difference----most couples don't communicate love in the same way. Well, once couples realize how little they have in common they often think they made a big mistake and must give up on the relationship---and start searching for a NEW DEAL. They think their only option is to quit the marriage and renew their quest for someone who is the perfect match for them.

This reminds me of the ancient Greek legend of a Cyprian king named Pygmalion who found a unique way to solve potential marital differences. He became so frustrated with his inability to find his perfect match---the right woman to marry---that he decided to sculpt one. So, out of the most exquisite ivory he could find he fashioned the woman of his dreams. When he was done, he bowed and prayed, and the ivory woman miraculously came to life. Pygmalion took his perfect match as his wife, and they lived happily ever after.

Well, when husbands and wives discover how different they are they often use Pygmalion's technique and chisel and sculpt away their spouses "flaws." But this is a mistake. You see if a marriage is to be strong---if the husband and wife are to be a team---then they need to learn to discover and embrace-and even DELIGHT in---one another's uniqueness. As someone once put it, "When two people always AGREE in marriage one of them is not necessary." To have a whole marriage, you need to have some diversity.

In verse 24 of our text, it says that in marriage as God intended, husband and wife become "ONE." Well, as you may remember my telling you over the years, the Greek word is pronounced, "heis" and HEIS means "UNITY," but it was also used to express the idea of UNIQUENESS and this may seem a bit contradictory. I mean, to say, "The two shall become ONE," seems much different than to say, "The two shall be come UNIQUE."

But what Jesus was saying was that---a Godly marriage is one that honors both your UNITY and your UNIQUENESS. Think of marriage as two circles so close that they have one ellipse of overlapping area. The overlapping area can symbolize the UNITY part of marriage---while the non-overlapping parts represent the uniqueness parts of the relationship. And you need both for a marriage to be healthy.

Couples should share SOME common interests but to be whole, their relationship needs differences as well---because then husbands and wives form a partnership far stronger than either one alone as they compensate for each other's weaknesses and encourage each other's strengths. One of the best tools for discovering each other's unique differences is the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator test. How many of you have taken it or are familiar with it?

Well, for the rest of you, the philosophy behind this test is that all people approach four selected areas of life in ways that are fundamentally DIFFERENT---but equally RIGHT. Let's review them briefly.

**A. The first area of difference looks at where people get their ENERGY and how this impacts their RELATIONSHIPS.**

EXTROVERTS derive energy from social contact, so they like to be with people. INTROVERTS on the other hand, derive energy from solitude. They prefer to be alone. Do we have any EXTROVERTS present today? I'd ask for INTROVERTS to raise their hands but won't because I know they'd prefer to remain anonymous!

**B. The second area of difference is how people take in and handle INFORMATION and how they solve PROBLEMS.**

INTUITIVE people focus on ideas and possibilities. They're imaginative people who constantly dream of better ways to do things. They're big-picture types who don't like to get mired down in intricate details and procedures. On the other hand, SENSING people say, "I'll trust you when I see the facts! Give me the pertinent data first." This is one of the things that makes meetings "interesting" because you have DREAMERS and you have DOERS and it's often difficult to get them to agree on things. How many INTUITIVES do we have here this morning? What about SENSORS?

**C. The third area has to do with how we make DECISIONS.**

THINKERS make them based on clear logic and practicality. They take a cool calculated approach and look at obvious cause and effect. To them, if it makes sense do it. Clear and simple. Thinkers are concerned about productivity,

efficiency, profitability, effectiveness, and achievement of goals. But their opposite---FEELERS---base their decisions on more people-oriented implications. FEELERS agonize over confrontations and lose sleep over decisions that impact other people.

This week I read about a company called *“BeAnotherLab.”* The head of this company believes that virtual reality (VR) *“shouldn’t give you heaven, but hardship.”* So, they let a VR wearer interact with real events virtually. The programmers have created virtual experiences that range from being a Sudanese refugee seeking asylum to living with physical disabilities. Cofounder Philippe Bertrand says, *“CGI works, but you don’t need a machine to feel empathy. Just look the person in the face and talk with them.”*

For marriage to work we need both THINKERS---who will act---and FEELERS who will feel compassion---because feeling and acting go together.

#### **D. The final area deals with basic life ORIENTATION.**

STRUCTURED people prefer a predictable routine. They thrive on organization. They respond well to deadlines, rules, and policies. They like to make a plan and stick with it and are frustrated by interruptions, surprise, or change.

UNSTRUCTURED people prefer spontaneity. They HATE routines, rules, and deadlines, and avoid planning at all costs. They prefer to let the day unfold naturally and see what adventure might be just around the corner. They are “play-it-by-ear” people, because they like life best when it’s unplanned and unsettled, when all the options are open.

Now let’s do a quick survey.

How many of you, after hearing this, realize you are married to an opposite in some way--a thinker to a feeler---an extrovert to an introvert, etc.? Well, if you discovered that then don’t despair. Neither of these four different extremes are righter than the other. As I said about feelers and thinkers---both are important. So, if you are an intuitive married to a sensor or a structured married to an unstructured---then thank God because He has just given you someone uniquely gifted to make up for your weaknesses. You are stronger---more complete---together as a marital unit than you would have been alone. You need a spouse who is different than you.

Understanding our differences has other benefits.

- First, it’s harder to LOVE someone exactly like you---actually it would be narcissic.
- And---it’s hard to resolve marital conflicts until you see the underlying issues---issues that more often than not come from spouses’ uniqueness.

When spouses quit passing judgement on their differences then they open the door for workable compromise---actual solutions to their problems---and end up working as a team---delighting in the very differences that once caused division. So, in order to nurture a healthy marriage spouses must be committed to the long haul. They must seek to understand and embrace each other’s differences and third and most important:

#### **3.) Spouses must invite GOD into their relationship.**

Marriage is designed to function best with each spouse acknowledging Christ as Lord. When spouses do this---marriage WORKS---when they don’t, it DOESN’T or at the very best it is a mere shadow of what it could be. The fact is we can’t love each other in the way we are designed to need to be loved on our own. We need an outside power source to do this, and that power source is God.

- He gives us the power to forgive each other.
- He gives us the compassion to love our spouse---even when they are unloving.
- He gives us the patience to keep our “long haul” commitment.

The tragic truth is a husband and wife who leave God out of their marriage never REALLY understand what it MEANS to love one another. They never really experience TRUE intimacy.

In his book *Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships*, Chip Ingram points out that our culture has marriage all wrong. I love the way he has done this. He rightly concludes that the world says that these are the steps to marital bliss:

- a. FIND the right person.
- b. FALL in love.
- c. FIX your hopes and dreams on this person for your future fulfillment.
- d. If FAILURE occurs get a NEW DEAL by repeating steps a, b, and c.

But God's prescription for marital joy is much different. It goes like this:

- a. BECOME the right person.
- b. WALK in love.
- c. FIX your hope on God and seek to please Him through this relationship.
- d. If FAILURE occurs repeat steps 1, 2, 3.

Do you see the difference a relationship with God can make in a marriage? God says, instead of FINDING the right person, BE the right person. And this is so important because our love for others---especially our spouses---flows out of our sense of BEING deeply loved by God. So instead of LOOKING for love, God tells us to realize that love has already FOUND us. He loves us more than we could ever deserve. He meets our need for love. And the best way for us to demonstrate that we have understood and accepted God's love is to learn to imitate Him as closely as possible in the way we treat others---especially our spouses. For example, as Ephesians 4:32 says, Godly spouses are, **"...kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other JUST AS IN CHRIST GOD FORGAVE them."** Spouses who have a deep relationship with God through Jesus are secure in who they are---secure enough to be a GIVER instead of a TAKER. They can also WALK in love every day---giving their spouse what he or she needs the most when it is least deserved because they know that's exactly how God has treated them.

Christian spouses express their view of each other like this. They say, *"You are NOT the most important person in my life--Christ is. And because He is I'm going to treat you as the most important person in my life. Christ will help me love you more than I could ever love you in my strength alone."*

And---when the inevitable problems come---in a marriage where God is honored they don't quit. They just repeat the first three steps. They work harder on BECOMING the right person and on WALKING in love and on relating in ways that GOD would want them to relate. Does that sound like a great spouse or what?!

Let's pray.