

A Hope and a Future
Week 4
Hope for your Marriage
October 3-4, 2020

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 16: 13-18

Welcome to Crossroads at home. We are so glad you're joining us today. My name is Christy Gibas, Pastor of Adult Life. And we are in week four of our series, "A Hope and a Future." This series is based on **Jeremiah 29:11** *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* And now more than ever, after six long months of a global crisis, we need hope from God.

Today, we're going to talk about Hope for Your Marriage. Now, before the single people tune out, stick with me because whether you're single or married, or want to be married or don't want to be married, one thing I know for sure is that God wants to offer you hope today. Now, this has been an interesting season. And though Covid has certainly been the cause of many problems, it has also revealed problems that we were just too busy to see. Some of the problems you are faced with right now are problems that were always there under the surface. But when we were hit with a crisis, we suddenly recognized:

- I don't deal with prolonged stress in a healthy way.
- Or, gosh, now that I'm stuck at home, I'm starting to notice my online shopping is out of control.
- Or an addiction to social media that was already there has now been revealed.

Our relationships or lack of relationships are the same way. We don't really have problems in our marriages because of Covid. The problems were there under the surface, but we had enough things going on that we didn't really have to deal with our marriage. Or maybe if you're single, you always knew you wanted to be married. But going through a lockdown on your own has really caused you to ask questions. And so today, we're going to talk about some practical ways that we can move forward and have God's best for us. Whether you're married or single, one thing is for sure. His plan for us is good. But also, we serve a personal God. He doesn't do cookie cutter. And so we need to know **His plan for us is individualized.** **Ephesians 2:10** says it like this: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* We don't serve a factory-made God. We serve a Master Craftsman who looks at you with delight and says, your story will not be like the story of your best friend. Though you may have things in common, God is writing a future that is a one-of-a-kind just for you. And isn't that what makes life so interesting?

I know the times that I blow it is when I look at someone else's life or someone else's marriage and think, "Why do they seem to have it all figured out, and I'm over here not having any of it figured out?" Social media is a great place to look and think the whole world is out there having the marriage of their lives, and my guy snores and works late! (I mean, not my guy, but your guy!) It's easy to fall into the trap where you look at the highlights of people's lives on social media and believe the lie that they have it all figured out and you're missing out on something. When I look at someone else's

life and someone else's marriage, I'm missing what God wants to do in my life. And according to Jeremiah 29:11, we can get excited because what He wants to do is good, and it's specific just for us! We can be at peace knowing that God can bring goodness to us no matter what our circumstances are and that His goodness reflects His character and is designed just for us. Some might be thinking, well, great. But this does not feel very good.

I know when we began lockdown in March, I was pleasantly surprised. My husband and I were both working from home and my daughter was doing schoolwork at home. And we sat on the couch together in the evenings and after several weeks I thought, good news! This isn't an act. We actually like each other! You may laugh at that, but I was pretty excited. I mean, here we are after 20 years of marriage -- for better or worse -- and we're taking selfies and putting on cute captions like, "Quarantine buddies." Then it hit me! We are those people! The ones where you see the highlight reels and don't know that marriage has played a huge role in making us who we are! My 15-year-old came out of her room one night as we were sitting on the couch with our big blankets and our heads together watching who knows what and she said, "Aw, you guys are like two little cute beans." And she snapped a picture and captioned it, "Two little cute beans." But what folks don't know when they see that is that we waded through a whole mess of stew to finally get down to two little cute beans!

When I got married, I had a vision. I had a vision for what I thought my marriage was going to be like and I found out it wasn't anything like I thought it would be. And this was take two! We both went through painful divorces. And by the way, divorce is painful. It feels worse than grieving a death. God hates divorce. But He doesn't hate divorcees. In fact, something that was so painful in my life actually caused me to finally make Jesus Lord.

So when we came into the marriage, we were both married before. And when you begin a marriage where there is previous marriage experience, that presents a whole new set of challenges. I mean, if you think in-laws are challenging, wait till you have ex-laws, which we are truly fortunate in this area, as well. We get along beautifully because we all have made Jesus Lord. So before I said, "I do," I had all these ideas about what our marriage would look like. I remember saying to Frank before we married, "I hope when we have kids, they have long legs like Megan." Referring to his daughter. And then I said, "I hope our kids are tall like Megan. I hope our kids are slim like Megan. In fact, I hope all of our kids look like your ex-wife!"

But here's what I found. When we got married, I became disappointed because my *vision did not line up with my reality*. Not only did we face infertility, but marriage just wasn't all it was cracked up to be. I remember thinking one day, I can't even go to the mailbox without telling someone! I mean, you picture yourself being together with someone. But for some reason, this 24/7 thing was not what it was cracked up to be!

Maybe that's you. Maybe the blended family thing is more than you thought it was going to be. Maybe you had a marriage experience that ended painfully in divorce, and marriage take two isn't healthy or stable. Maybe you are facing infertility that puts a strain on a marriage relationship. Maybe your financial situation has changed or you found out your spouse has different ideas about spending and saving than you do. Maybe you're struggling because your stepchildren resent your place in the family.

In all of it, God still has good plans for you. I could spend hours telling you about the things that looked really bleak and were really painful in my life that ended up being the places where God proved himself faithful time and time again and shaped me more to be like Jesus. And while my story is helpful and brings hope, God is wanting to write a story for you that is a one of a kind. Not a sequel to what He has done in my life, but a beautiful story that is all yours that will bring hope to someone else if you're transparent. When I pull the curtain back just a little bit and you see more than two cute little beans happily watching TV, you aren't looking at me and saying, "Man, what a mess." You're looking at life transformed. And families redeemed. And sin covered in grace. And that can be your story, too.

And so what do we do to get there? **I surrender my vision for His vision.** When I decided to surrender my life to Jesus and allow Him to be Lord, it wasn't because my life was going great. It was because I seemed to be messing it up! So I needed guidance. I needed wisdom. I needed something higher than my own vision for my life. And even after 24 years of me no longer being in charge, there are still areas that He gently tells me – nope. You need to lay that down. That's not for you. But the thing is, it's a choice. God, by His Spirit, will nudge me and let me know there are things that need to go. But I get to decide if I will have His best in that area. I get to decide if I will lay it down. **Proverbs 29:18** tells us: *Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.* Another version says, where there is no vision, people perish. So how do we surrender our vision? We need to **Pray for God's vision.**

Doing marriage my way, or even singleness my way, causes me to get off track from God's best plan. But when I know what His plan is for my marriage, or what His plan is for my singleness, it keeps me from experiencing pain. And if you're in a place of pain, when you pray for His vision and you obey what He tells you, little by little, healing and wholeness are restored. Disappointment in marriage comes from having thwarted expectations. When your vision doesn't match your reality, it can feel defeating.

I've had people come to me and say, my husband isn't leading spiritually. What do I do? Their reality isn't matching their expectation. But truly, we are as close to Jesus as we want to be. No one needs to lead us in order to grow spiritually. We make a decision to grow spiritually. And then Jesus, by His Word and Spirit, leads us. And on the flipside, husbands can be disappointed when their wives aren't responding the way they thought they should. You might hear, well, they aren't following my lead. We can have conflict in marriages when we fight about who is in charge. But when people surrender to Jesus and allow Him to lead, the need for conflict goes away.

One of the Holiest prayers I ever prayed was, "Lord, I'm a young person. If you want me to stay in this marriage, you need to do something about it." In that non-eloquent sentence, I was saying, I need help. You lead. Give me your vision. If you feel lost, pray simply, "Lord, show me your vision for this." And truly, don't stress about it. If you get nothing right away, keep asking and be at peace. He will show you. God is loving and merciful, and His character is good. He wants to show you His vision for you. He wants to give you revelation and insight.

Next, **find another Christ Follower who has been there**, done that. If you're unhappy in your marriage, make friends with another couple who loves Jesus and

spend time with them. This is called discipleship. Jesus intended to transform our lives through relationship with others. Generally, when we experience trouble in our lives, our first default mode is to isolate and hide. In fact, that was the very first strategy the first couple used, Adam and Eve, when they sinned. They decided to hide. Check it out for yourself in Genesis Chapter 3. But that strategy of hiding was not a good one. The problem doesn't go away. You have problems. And to top it off, you're just alone.

You hear us say quite often to get in a small group. The reason why we're so passionate about people being in groups is that when we're in groups together with other followers of Christ, we're more likely to take action and do the things God is asking of us. We help spur each other along and encourage one another to obey God. And when we take action and obey God, things begin to change.

So I invite you to **join a small group**. You can go to xr.church and find one, or you can let us know you would like to try a group and our team can help you get connected. We have groups that meet online and groups that meet in person. We can help you get one that is a good fit for you.

And on the flipside of being in relationships with others, make sure your relationships are ones that honor your marriage. In other words, what your friends say about marriage and your spouse matters. It's why we need godly relationships. We need people who are for us and for our marriage. When you think of sorting out problems, getting an outside voice is always a good idea. Christian counseling doesn't have to be a last resort. Here at Crossroads, when you get married you attend Becoming One, a marriage retreat, and also speak with a counselor to help you think through issues as a couple and plan for a good marriage.

Good futures begin with good thoughts. It matters what you dwell on.

Philippians 4:8 tells us: *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things.*

My husband has worked shiftwork for the majority of our marriage. One night about ten years ago, when our daughter was small, we were up late. It was about midnight because Frank had just gotten home from work. We were sitting on the couch talking about the day and catching up before bed, and suddenly, it sounded like someone was busting our front door down. Well, instincts kicked in. Frank jumped over me where I was sitting and ran for the front door, which was to the left. And I ran to the kitchen, which was to the right, away from the front door, I might add. And so I did what anyone in my shoes would do. I went to the butcher block and got the big knife out. And then I waited. Because if they got past him, I was ready. And suddenly, I heard laughter from the front door. Our whole yard was covered in pink flamingos. It seems that the cheerleaders in our school district were doing a fundraiser, and you paid to have the flamingos removed from your yard and placed in someone else's yard. Apparently, these girls didn't know you just let it be a surprise in the morning when you see the birds and the sign. There is no busting the front door down and running away. So it took a while to get our pulses back to normal. But the next day driving to work I was like, "If someone's about to get us, my man goes for the door. Those cheerleaders are not getting past him." Truly, my admiration for him grew. He didn't know there was no danger.

I have found over the years that it matters what you think about your spouse. When I start getting picky, I remember, gosh, he works hard. When I get annoyed about things, I think, wow, he's a great dad. When we take inventory and think on what is praiseworthy and what is of high report about our spouse, our attitudes are changed, and it helps our love grow.

But not only does it matter what you think about your spouse when you're having trouble, it matters what you think about God. **Matthew 16**, starting in verse 13, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" Verse 14 goes on and states ***14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*** ***15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*** ***16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*** ***17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter,^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell^[b] will not overcome it.***

What Jesus was doing was trying to find out, who am I to you?

I don't know what you're going through today. But the One who wants to help you write your story does. He knows exactly what you are dealing with. He knows of the money problems you face. He knows of the loneliness you face. He knows about your infertility. He knows about the addiction. He knows about the pain you have in your marriage. He knows about the fight you had. He knows your highlight reels that you post on social media don't line up with the way that you feel. Jesus knows all of this, and He is standing with His arms wide open to you asking, "Who do you say that I am?" Because once we answer that question, our problems come into perspective. A broken marriage can become whole. Healing can happen. No matter what you face today, I believe Jesus is asking you this same question. Who do you say I am?

If your vision for your future isn't lining up with your reality, make Him Lord. As we follow Him, His perspective unfolds to us, sometimes in ways we didn't expect. Our life hasn't been smooth sailing. Our marriage has been hard. We've hurt each other on many occasions. We have truly experienced richer, poorer, sickness, and health. But once we said, "Jesus you are Lord," he began to shape us as we obeyed Him. When you make Jesus Lord, you have hope. Because the future He has for you is good.

Let's pray.