

What Marriage Is and Isn't

This morning we are going to look at a MARRIAGE. And just like last week I want to put us in a proper posture to receive what God has for us by praying and giving each of you an opportunity to open your heart to what God wants to do in your marriage.

We recognize that in the room today we are all in different places regarding marriage:

- 1) There may be some who are currently struggling in their marriage and may be on the verge of divorce if something doesn't change. We obviously want to pray for God to not only save these marriages but we want Him to allow you to experience the true joy of marriage.
- 2) We have some who are happily married and we want to pray for God to continue to strengthen and protect these marriages.
- 3) We have single people who one day would like to get married. We want to pray that God would prepare your heart to be the spouse He calls you to be and to help you find your lifelong mate.
- 4) Then there is the currently divorced or separated and maybe even some of those who have remarried. We want to pray for healing because we know divorce leaves some deep scars that if not healed will negatively impact any future relationships you may have.
- 5) And finally, there is the skeptic! Who may feel marriage is silly and that it is just about a piece of paper for legal purposes. We want to pray that God helps you see that marriage is so much more.

To prompt our heart for prayer, here are some scriptures that highlight marriage!

“So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (**Genesis 1:27–28, NIV**).

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (**Genesis 2:24, ESV**).

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (**Matthew 19:6, NIV**).

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ... And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12, ESV**).

PRAY over our people and their marriages.

What is Marriage and what is it all about? Someone once said that marriage is like flies on a screen door. All the flies on the outside want to get IN and all the flies on the inside want to get OUT.

Welcome to **Week 3** of our series called **FIGHTING FOR YOUR FAMILY**. Through this series we are hoping to encourage you and help strengthen your family by taking a look at 6 areas where the FAMILY is under attack. In WEEK 1 we looked at **A Mother’s High Calling**. Last week we looked at **A VISION for Parenting**. And today we want to look at **What Marriage Is and What It Isn’t**. As we have said each week, so much of the dysfunction we see in our world today really is a byproduct of the deterioration of the family. Whether it is exhausted mothers overwhelmed by their enormous responsibilities, emotionally and spiritually challenged father’s who have become distracted by life, or children growing up in a world without a vision for their lives, our families are really taking a beating and the waves of the culture are shipwrecking our homes.

When it comes to marriage I have never met anyone who was planning to get married that ever said to me, “*Well our intention is to have a miserable life together.*” Yet, when it comes to marriage, if we are just slightly off in our expectations or in our thinking about marriage it doesn’t take long and we can be way off from what God intended from the beginning. (Like an arrow pointed at a target. If the arrow is off just a little bit in the beginning it will miss the whole target)

So, what I want us to do today is paint a clear picture of exactly what marriage is all about by looking at TWO Foundational Commitments we must make when it comes to marriage and then we will close our time by looking at THREE types of HEARTS we need in order to make these commitments. NOW, Before we look at the foundational commitments we need to understand why God gave us marriage in the first place. And here it is, plain and simple!

Marriage is designed to reveal the nature of God’s relationship with His people!! It is a picture of the covenant of love and commitment God makes to His people and the desire He has for them to be one with Him. In the Bible when God talks about his relationship with Israel it is always in language symbolic of a covenant relationship between a man and a woman. Here are a few examples.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 (NIV) “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. **32** It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their mind and write it on their hearts I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Isaiah 62:3-5 (NIV) You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. **4** No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (which means my delight is in her), and your land Beulah (which means married); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. **5** As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Notice that even though there are difficulties in the relationship, the commitment of love is still there and unwavering because God’s desire is that His people be one with Him. It is no wonder that God chose marriage as the foundational relationship for all of human society. He wanted a picture at the center of every family and every home to be a picture of God’s covenant love and commitment to His people. He wants our children and our neighbors to see that God loves them and He is committed to them and wants nothing more than for them to be one with Him.

Marriage is not about us! It is about Him!!

Now, let’s look at God’s design for marriage and the TWO Foundational Commitments we must make when it comes to marriage.

Genesis 2:18-25 (ESV) **18** Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; We are designed for community! When we try to live for ourselves and isolate and alienate it is why things usually don’t go well for us. **18** Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” **19** Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **20** The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. **21** So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. **22** And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

2 Commitments we are to make in marriage:

Commitment #1 - A Man and Woman will leave father and mother

Loyalty is to be transferred from mother and father to one's spouse. No longer looking to mom and dad for guidance, direction or purpose! This doesn't mean that they no longer have a part in our lives - it just means we have a new focus and our loyalty now must be given to each other. We have to establish balance and boundaries in our relationships with the husband wife relationship now taking center stage. In other words, our spouse now becomes our priority over all other human relationships. This includes our children and our best friends! Doesn't mean we can't have other relationships but it does mean we give our spouse priority. Example, mom wants to have you over for dinner. Before you commit you verify and confirm with your spouse making sure they didn't have other plans. (This goes for friends, children etc.)

Some parents are control freaks and want to control by guilt, shame and manipulation.

Boundaries have to be set. No wife should ever have to doubt that her husband's loyalty is to her and vice versa. You also have to leave past attachments such as old girl friends or relationships. A wife must know that she is loved and cherished above all other relationships!! Trust is being built through many acts of faithfulness. The man is called to this because he should set the standard. This doesn't mean that the wife should not do the same. Ladies, this also goes for your children as well. Otherwise unhealthy relationships will be created. Your spouse should be the number human being in your life. Above friends, above children, above family, above any other relationships. If not, it becomes a breeding ground for mistrust and unfaithfulness which will separate and divide you.

How many relationships have been shipwrecked at the beginning because of this first commitment? Let me speak to young married couples who are planning to have children. Wives make sure that your new child does not become a substitute for your husband. As parents we need to make sure our kids understand that they are an addition to the family, not the center of it! Young families, mom and dad don't let the children and the day to day chaos of family schedule keep you from your commitment to one another. Young husbands make sure you share important information or discuss important matters with your wife before you talk with your mother and ladies vice versa. God's design is that you look to each other for comfort when stressed out. You look to each other for encouragement when dealing with difficult issues. When struggling, tell your spouse first before confiding in friends. Keep communication lines open and intimacy running hot! **Commitment #1 - A Man and Woman will leave father and mother!**

Commitment #2 - A Man and Woman will Covenant together and become one

A promise of commitment that is sealed in a formal covenant based on one's willingness to give themselves to the other without conditions or expectations is vital. The idea that I will love my spouse unconditionally. I will honor and respect you without conditions. I will give myself to you freely. It is the only way to truly become one. It is more than saying that I love you. It is a promise to one another that no matter what, I am yours and you are mine. A covenant before God is established and then the marriage consummated

through sex signifying our oneness. If you can't do that or are unwilling to do that then please don't get married.

The greatest picture of this is God's relationship with the church through Jesus Christ! In fact, marriage is all about revealing God and His love for His people. And how does God do that? With a covenant promise sealed with the blood of His son that makes it possible for us to become one with Him through the Holy Spirit by faith and who's love never waivers based on what we do. Isn't it interesting that the first human institution is structured in such a way as to demonstrate the GOSPEL (God's love for us). The one flesh union is more than the physical act of sex it is also metaphysical in that we become united together as one in being. What I do to my spouse I do to myself because we have become one. **(Ephesians 5:28-31 ESV)** 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This of course is beautifully displayed in the life that is created through children.

The way a man loves his wife makes a statement about God's love for us **(Ephesians 5:25-27 ESV)** 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. . The way a woman honors and loves her husband says something about how we are to love God **(Ephesians 5:22-24 ESV)** 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. . The way a husband and wife navigate their selfish hearts and overcomes challenges and difficulties designed to rip apart our unity and oneness says something to our children about how it is we are to love others. **(Matthew 22:37-40 ESV)** 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Marriage not only says something about God but as we submit ourselves to it we allow God to make us holy as we learn about love and deal with our selfish hearts through love and patient endurance. Holiness is God's goal for our lives.

1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV) 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

In fact, we could say that the personal benefit of marriage is that we become HOLY, not become HAPPY. Marriage has taught me personally more about my own selfishness and has helped me be more selfless than anything else in my life.

This is God's standard for Marriage! These are the commitments we must be willing to commit to. No wonder Satan hates marriage and why it has been under attack since day one!! So what kind of heart do we need to make these kinds of commitments? What about those who are struggling in their marriage currently and feel like there is no hope. Maybe you are starting over again or have some reservations regarding marriage or feel it is a lost cause. I want to give you some hope! I want you to experience what God has for you in marriage by showing you the kind of heart you need for marriage.

What kind of heart do you need? The reality is it is not possible to have a better marriage until you have a better heart! We can give you five things to make your marriage better but if we do not address our heart we will never get to the root of our problem. And if I can just be honest with you, our marital problems all stem from the matters of the heart. I have been married for 32 years come JUNE and the only reason I have been is because Jesus has been dealing with my selfish heart. I say this to young couples all the time. SELFISHNESS is the #1 marriage killer! The only cure for this problem is JESUS!! As we close, let me give you THREE TYPES OF HEARTS that are necessary if we want to live out the two vital commitments to marriage that reflects God's glory!!

Heart TYPE #1 - We need a NEW heart - The Bible says we have a heart of stone and that God wants to give us a new heart. Listen to what God said to Israel in the OT. Btw, this promise is fulfilled through Jesus the Messiah

Ezekiel 36:24-29 (ESV) 24 "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. **28** Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. **29** I will save you from all your uncleanness. What was true of Israel is also true of us.

God wants to make us a new creation through Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. Have you let GOD do that by surrendering your heart of stone to Him by faith in His SON Jesus?

Heart TYPE #2 - We need an HONEST heart - We need to address the little foxes that have been robbing our marital vineyard of its fruitfulness. If we want to move forward in a healthy way we cannot pretend that the past doesn't exist. We must talk about things that have hurt us, made us angry, made us feel unappreciated, etc. and we must reconcile with the person we feel has hurt us. If we are still holding any resentment or hard feelings we need to address such issues. If not, they will impact our ability to trust and to love others moving forward. Btw, sin

committed against us has made us hard hearted and if we are not careful that will carry over into all of our other relationships.

Here are some questions you may need to address with your spouse:

- Have our parents/family caused a strain on our relationship? In what ways? What do we need to do in order to protect our marriage that still allows us to honor our parents?
- Are there any past attachments that have placed a strain on our relationship? Friendships, old romantic relationships, children, etc.?
- Is there any past hurt toward each other that we are holding onto that we need to discuss and resolve?

Read and meditate on **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**. "What should these verses mean for a person like me who struggles with sexual temptation and sin."

You may need to seek out some personal counseling and or couples counseling if you find yourself stuck or unable to work through and resolve these issues on your own. Do not neglect and do not isolate.

An honest evaluation and attempt to reconcile issues is vital to your heart and in order for your relationship with your spouse to be healthy.

Heart TYPE #3 - We need a FORGIVING heart - One of the default commitments you are making in your commitment to be one is a commitment to forgive when wronged. It is not a matter of IF, it is a matter of WHEN. Marriage is two imperfect people trying to love each other and share life together. We will hurt each other. It is inevitable. We need to be quick to forgive and humble ourselves when we hurt others.

Ephesians 4:25-32 (ESV) 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. **26** Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil. **28** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Invitation:

Wherever you are, please know that God doesn't want you to feel guilt or condemnation! He wants you to be reconciled and forgiven. He wants you to be healed and restored! Will you let

Him today by confessing and repenting and allowing God to give you a new heart and a new start?

For some of us we need to sit down and have some honest conversations! Don't give room to the devil. Address those past hurts and FORGIVE!! Let God restore and bring healing into your marriage. If necessary, seek counseling!

Do you need to renew your commitment to your spouse? Have you left father and mother? Have you forsaken all others? Have you pledged your love to one another and are you becoming one?

Don't do life alone! Even as a couple, you need community! It's easy to isolate as a family and go after everything but community!