

FIRST COMES LOVE
What You Must Do with the Me in the We
John 12:24-25
Ephesians 5:21-33

Last week, we talked about how relationships START, and we focused FIRST not on the person that you need to DATE or MARRY, but on the person that YOU are now BECOMING. We talked about the importance of GUARDING OUR HEARTS. In that message, we learned that CHOOSING the right person is based first upon BEING the right person. I challenge you to listen to that message if you are in (or are headed for) a season of dating. [\[New Rules for Love, Sex, and Dating – Andy Stanley\]](#)

Today, I want us to focus on what happens once you actually are married, and how you can guard the heart of your marriage. God himself designed both the beauty and the structure of marriage at the very beginning of Creation. In Genesis, when God brought Eve to Adam, he revealed a marvelous truth about the INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP that he had designed for them. Here are the words the Scripture records: **Genesis 2:21-23, 24-25 NLT**
 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. 23 "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" 24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. 25 Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

God CREATED you to experience ONENESS in your marriage. This means that your IDENTITY is forever LINKED to this person that you marry. God wants you to learn how to LIVE IN and LOVE this INTIMATE UNION in marriage, but you will have to FIGHT for it. Adam and Eve started out great! And things went smoothly for a little while; but only for a little while. Things fell apart when SIN entered the picture, and Adam and Eve found themselves having to struggle to adjust to each other's BROKENNESS. The truth is, the honeymoon only lasts a little while for EVERY marriage. Reality sets in, and then you have to learn how to PURSUE one another without the POWER of EMOTIONAL ATTRACTION once the MYSTERY seems to have gone away. But on the backside of that fading passion is a whole new level of intimacy. We have to learn the same thing. **Your struggle to stay connected and passionate is NOT UNIQUE to you.** This should encourage you.

I hope to ENCOURAGE all of you who are married no matter what the condition of your marriage currently happens to be. [Some of you are AFRAID that you CHOSE the WRONG person because you "just don't love each other the way you used to," and now you think your hopes of marital bliss are DOOMED. Don't you believe it.](#) I want to let you know that HEALING and HEALTH is actually VERY POSSIBLE in your marriage, and you are FAR CLOSER to INTIMACY than you would ever guess. Believe it. I am thinking right now of a couple that came to my office with their relationship in absolute SHREDS. Nearly every dysfunction and failure known to

marriage was present in that home, and I felt like they came into my office with this tangled and twisted MESS asking ME to FIX it. I was overwhelmed. But God intervened in that marriage in a magnificent way, and they are now wonderfully in love again. Your story may be just as messed up as that one, but it can also change as that one did! So, before you decide that you married the WRONG person, **I want to remind you of some very common PATTERNS in marriage relationships that will help you not to lose hope**, and then I want to spend the majority of our time on a SINGLE TRUTH that will help you to GUARD the HEART of your marriage.

Marriage is a LIVING THING that will constantly be changing.

- Your marriage is NOT the same today as it was ONE YEAR ago.
 - *Seasons change, Circumstances change, YOU change [140 lbs to 200!]
 - *This is actually PART of what makes marriage EXCITING.
 - [CLEAVE – Never stop CHASING!]
- All marriages go through PHASES. [This can SCARE you if you don't know it]
 - *Last week, we talked about ATTRACTION and ATTACHMENT.
 - You have to WORK PAST the attraction phase to get to attachment!
 - You have to BUILD BONDERS into your relationship:

BONDERS – Mutual investments in life/time that help bind you together.

Fun/Hobbies

Faith

- Praying FOR one another regularly
- Praying together – Sharing our hearts for God together
- Reading/Studying resources together – Growing in our faith together
- Engaging in spiritual community together
- Developing Christ-centered friendships

Finances

- *Common resources – Pooling our resources together
- *Common financial goals – Setting and reaching goals together
- *Common rewards – Enjoying our resources together
 - Why we bought a PONTOON BOAT and not a BASS BOAT!
 - Going on vacations together

Sex – You have to actually HAVE sex for it to be a bonder!

Children – Mutual investment as parents.

- *Our decision to homeschool – Why we did it? Control our schedule

-There is a MAJOR CYCLE that is COMMON in all marriages:

***DELIGHT – DISILLUSIONMENT - _____ - DELIGHT or DIVORCE**

Between Disillusionment and either the rebirth of Delight or Divorce, there is a HUGE DECISION that YOU must make. It will be painful and costly. But, you can either CHOOSE your PAIN, or you can just let pain CHOOSE YOU!

I love the way that the Bible talks about marriage. God speaks of marriage in poetic language and rich imagery. In several places, God speaks of marriage as a beautiful GARDEN. The Song of Solomon makes this most clear! A garden has to be tended

and cared for if it is to be productive. As you picture a fabulous garden in your mind, I want to remind you that before all of that PRODUCE began to FORM on those vines, and even before a gardener watered and weeded it, something FIRST had to be done that is both SURPRISING and DISTURBING. [This troubling TRUTH is the BASIS for the rest of this message.](#) In fact, I want to use a most UNLIKELY Scripture to start our conversation about marriage together today. **John 12:24-25 NLT**

24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and DIES, it REMAINS only a SINGLE seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

***First rule of gardening: A SEED has to DIE before a PLANT is BORN.**

[Remember, a SEED is not called a PLANT until it has been PLANTED!] This truth is before you EVERY DAY as you look at the world of trees/plants around you!

Some time ago, I heard Pastor Mark Gungor make a statement on a Focus on the Family broadcast that simply ROCKED MY WORLD. **He stated the truth that one cannot read the New Testament without coming to the conclusion that God wants to KILL YOU.** This is NOT because God is HEARTLESS or CRUEL. Just the opposite! Motivated by his love, Jesus taught that the only way for us to really live is for us to DIE to our SIN and our REBELLION. Face it; we are MESSED UP! And we know that the only way that we will get better is to DIE to our SELVES. This is exactly what Jesus taught in the New Testament about the Christian life. [Let me take this one step further as it relates to marriage. If you want to experience lasting intimacy with another person, then some things in you will have to die.](#) God knew this. **Marriage actually was designed to KILL YOU!**

That's right. You and I are broken, selfish, rebellious people, and all it takes is a marriage to bring that brokenness to light! After I got married, I discovered what a self-centered, lazy, self-serving person that I am. [\[Not because Lisa TOLD ME!\]](#) Maybe you can only see how lazy and selfish YOUR SPOUSE IS right now, but that is a key indicator of just how broken YOU really are. You just don't SEE it! If you will give this truth room in your heart, it just MIGHT bring you to a new day at home!

Now, in order to LIGHTEN the mood a bit about this HEAVY truth, I decided to write a POEM about a it. Here is my poem. It is also the TITLE of this message.

What You Must DO with the ME in the WE

[It's wonderful fun when TWO become ONE,
And their ME turns to WE until life here is DONE.](#)

[Yet sometimes this ONESOME feels more like a TWOSOME
When EACH wants to WINSOME, but NONE wants to LOSESOME.](#)

And their JOY turns to ICE when some ONE won't play NICE,
So they BOTH turn away and their LOVE pays the PRICE.

OH! What do you DO with the ONE in the TWO,
When the ONE that needs work is not THEM, but it's YOU?

WELL . . . if ONE would just DIE to the SELF and the I,
Then the WE would be BETTER than the ME and the MY.

AND . . . if you BOTH lay down ME and you pick up The THEE,
Then your ONE will be stronger – not as TWO – but as THREE!

I think that the spirit of Dr. Seuss took over my mind! Oh, well! The sad truth is that many people MOCK marriage because it is DIFFICULT. They call it the old "BALL and CHAIN," and they speak of it as if it is a PRISON. **Yet, it is actually one of the most liberating and joyful relationships on planet earth if you do not RESIST the very DESIGN of God in marriage.**

*If you are NOT a Christian, you may say that this does not affect you. But it does.
-First, you are so frustrated in your current marriage that it is KILLING you!
-Yet, you have NO INTENTION of dying to yourself, your DESIRES, or your DEMANDS. If your spouse does not change, what are your options?
-You can CHOOSE to die to yourself, but you are NOT free to KILL your spouse!

*I am no genius, but I want to use God's Word and my own experience to help you see what this truth LOOKS LIKE in a real relationship.

So, WHAT must YOU DIE TO in order to have a healthy marriage?

Die to your SINGLE world. Ephesians 5:21-22, 25 NASB

21 Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. . . 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

When I gave my heart to Christ, I could no longer IDENTIFY myself APART from Jesus. In a similar way, once I committed myself in marriage to Lisa, I can no longer IDENTIFY myself apart from her. I am now ONE with her, and everything I do affects her. I have to DIE to the OLD ME and come alive to the NEW ME.

*Your EVERY action now INTIMATELY INVOLVES ANOTHER PERSON.

-When you were single, your ONE was just YOU. Now it is Y'ALL!

[Vs. 21 - "Be SUBJECT to one another . . ."]

-This means that HE must SERVE her NEEDS. **[LOVE]**

-This means that SHE must SUBMIT to his LEADERSHIP. **[RESPECT]**

Refuse to live in secrecy or silence! [Are you still keeping a private world?]

*Requires HONESTY [Relationships, Finances, struggles, etc.]

REJECT an unrealistic AGENDA.

*Ministry pursuits (Rick) (Story on the porch swing)

*Desire to be at everything (Lisa - Role at home)

Die to your ILLUSIONS.

Surrender your unspoken expectations

[Wives: "Submit to & Respect your husband."]

*Illusions must be surrendered in order to experience a great REALITY.

*Relational Expectations. [Based on fantasy and emotion.]

*Sexual Illusions! [Often created by pornography.]

Die to your PRIDE.

RICK – REFUSE your right to BLAME your spouse or to DEFEND your self.

*Own your failure and the process of healing that WILL BE painful for both.

LISA – Choose to be VULNERABLE. ("What will you do if HE never gets better?")

*Requires BROKENNESS in your OWN LIFE!

*Requires FORGIVENESS.

-Lisa: LETTER that she wrote to me at that time.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DIE TO IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

Have all married people stand up.

Pray over those people.

26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

One could say that we are engineered for the longer lasting *attachment* phase, and the *attraction* phase is meant to be a portal into the attachment phase, and not something unto itself. The good news is that as a relationship moves into the attachment phase, the attraction phase recycles, and long-married couples often experience the sense of falling in love all over again - several times through their marriage.