

The High-Leverage Family
One Simple Rule
April 20, 2014

PRELUDE – O The Deep Deep Love

**Worship – Lead Me to The Cross
Video – “Sunday’s Comin”**

**Intro /Scripture – Rick
Worship – Great God Who Saves**

Turn & Greet w/video

Feature – “Gone, Gone, Gone”

What a great song with which to begin a series about marriage and family relationships.¹

*I would do it for you
You will never sleep alone
I'm not moving on
I'll love you long after you're gone (gone gone).*

As a pastor, I’ve done a lot of weddings in my day and in every one of them, that’s the kind of love everyone intends to give and hopes to receive when they say “I do.”

So, this morning I want to talk to you about one simple rule that, if you follow it, has the potential to greatly increase the likelihood of you actually getting to experience that in your marriage. In other words, if both you and your spouse will do (and keep doing) *this one thing* you will develop a strong and happy marriage. If your spouse doesn’t do it, at the very least, it will help you become the kind of person who can *give* that kind of love, even if you don’t always receive it back.

But before we get into that, I should probably say something about why we’re starting a series on marriage and family on Easter Sunday.

If you’ve been in church every Sunday for your entire life or if you’re among those who just make it in for the big holidays, you know the usual drill for Easter, right? It’s happening at almost every church in the world this morning. Congregations are combining music, scripture and dramatic readings to remember the crucifixion and celebrate the resurrection (as we have done this morning) but right about now, at this point in the service, the pastor is most likely giving a sermon about the resurrection of Jesus: why it’s totally reasonable to believe it really did happen and what it means that it did.

So, I hope you won't be too disappointed to hear this ... but I gave that sermon ... *last* Sunday. Quite frankly, it was one of the best presentations I've ever given on the subject so, if you're interested, you can listen to it in the media section of our church website.

And I did it last Sunday because I knew that a bunch of people in this room today would be making their annual "pilgrimage" to church and that they have pretty much experienced the same service and heard the same sermon year after year. I also knew that at least a few folks would be here for the very first time because they got one of our nifty invitations in the mail or they were invited by a friend.

So, I decided that we should try to give both groups a taste of what we do and the kinds of things we talk about *on a regular Sunday*. For instance ...

- Every week, we try to have a drama or a video that ties into the topic for the day. I'll have one of those in just a few minutes.
- Every week, we usually sing only one or two songs congregationally as opposed to standing and singing for 30 minutes like many contemporary churches – not that there is anything wrong with that. It's just that not everyone is into that, especially many men.
- On a regular Sunday our band will usually do one or two "feature" songs including one that you might hear on secular radio (like the Phillip Phillips tune we just heard) that sets up what we're going to talk about that week ...
- ... which is usually some real life issue and how knowing Jesus as your savior can make a difference in that issue.

... which brings me back to the series we're beginning today: *The High-Leverage Family* – five powerful principles that will impact your marriage and family relationships for the better.

And I'll just say it right up front so there's no doubt about it: the reason I believe these principles *are* so powerful is that they are rooted in what Jesus did on the cross and in his resurrection ... which is why my goal today and in the weeks to follow is not merely to provide *good advice* on how to make marriage or parenting (or any other relationship) work; it's to explain how the *good news* of what Jesus has done (i.e., "The Gospel") has the power to transform *us* ... and then as *we* change *our relationships* change as well.

A Universal Spiritual Law

So, let's get into this. Have you ever noticed that little ad that seems to pop up on so many websites these days?

(picture) Try this “one weird trick” to get a flat stomach? Follow this “one simple rule” to beat cancer – or some other deadly disease?

I don't know about you but whenever I see those ads I roll my eyes and I say “how can advertisers be so stupid as to think that people would be so stupid as to actually click on that?”

And then I click on it to see if maybe there is some secret hidden truth that *really would* instantly give me a flat stomach or *really would* protect me from cancer. Of course, as I know before I click, there isn't any such thing ... which is why it's kind of bold for me to title my message this morning “one simple rule” ... as if what I am going to tell you this morning is ...

- a) THE SECRET to a strong and happy marriage and ...
- b) Simple.

It might be the first but I'll level with you: it's certainly not the second!

In other words, what I'm about to tell you might actually be considered a secret because very few people would ever think of it on their own as the ultimate high-leverage principle for a successful marriage, and it's certainly not something you would hear promoted very often by our culture – on TV or in music or movies.

And it's not simple because ... well, I think that will become pretty obvious once I tell you what it is.

So, would you *like* for me to tell you what it is? Are you ready to click on that ad?

Actually, I think I would rather show you what it is – or at least, show you an example of what it is. Back in 2001, the late Heath Ledger starred in a romantic comedy which was set in the 14th century and loosely followed the plot of the first of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's story was called *The Knight's Tale*. The movie was called *A Knight's Tale*. How many of you have seen it?

I won't go into the whole storyline this morning other than to set up a scene that I think is probably the best illustration of the “one simple rule” that I have ever seen in my life. At this point in the movie, Ledger's character, William Thatcher (also known as “Sir Ulrich von Liechtenstein” from Gelderland) has made it big. He's a champion jousting about to compete in the biggest tournament of the year. And he wants to win it. Bad.

More importantly, at least for our purposes this morning, he's also fallen in love with the Lady Jocelyn who has, because of her great beauty, been the target of many worthy suitors and, therefore, is unmoved by his great accomplishments. That profoundly confuses him, so he begs her to tell him what he can do to prove his love for her.

As we watch, listen closely to what she tells him and, then, to how he responds.

WARNING: THERE IS A VERY BRIEF FADE AT 1:14 IN THIS CLIP. KEEP IT RUNNING. ☺

Video clip – A Knight’s Tale: Losing (3.0 min)

(B) William: “Jocelyn, how may I prove my love to you?”

(E) Fade on Jocelyn watching him lose.

<BEGIN SLIDE SET 2>

Such a great scene – and so much great theology! And I’m sure you now have at least a hint of the “one simple rule.” And if you don’t, don’t worry. I’ll just tell you what it is.

Actually, let me give you another illustration first ... this one from the Bible (which is probably a good thing since this is “church” right?)

All four gospel writers tell us the story of what happened on the night before Jesus’ crucifixion ... the night when Judas betrayed him but one of his closest disciples, the Apostle John, tells us about something that the other writers leave out. He writes that ...

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father.

This next part is very important:

He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.

So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing?” John 13:2,4-5 (NLT)

Great question! *You* understand what he was doing, don’t you? He’s demonstrating that secret high-leverage principle – the “one simple rule” – obviously not in a marriage context but *in friendship* (which illustrates that this principle works in all kinds of relationships).

Fortunately, in case you *don’t* understand what he was doing, Jesus explained it (because apparently the disciples didn’t get it).

He said:

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.”
John 13:13-15 (NLT)

And then he adds ...

“I tell you the truth: slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you if you do them.” *John 13:16-17(NLT)*

... which is a very important statement because what Jesus is saying is that what He is illustrating for his disciples (and for us) – this one simple rule – *is actually a universal spiritual law*. It is a high-leverage principle because it is consistent with how God designed things to work. And because of that, it has the power to change us and, eventually, to change our relationships.

And what’s even more profound (and I’ll just throw this in for free since you showed up today) is that the very existence of Jesus as a man – as well as his entire life (including his death) – was an illustration of this law and its power.

This is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote:

Christ Jesus ... though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself ...

*by taking on the form of a slave,
by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature.*

He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death —even death on a cross!

Now check this out ...

As a result God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. *Philippians 2:3-11 (NET)*

That’s the universal law, the high-leverage principle, the “one simple rule” illustrated to the maximum extent with the maximum result by the maximal person – the Son of God himself.

So what is that law? And I know you’re thinking “please just tell us!”

Here it is:

*“Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.”
Luke 17:33 (NLT)*

That’s what the life and death and resurrection of Jesus so profoundly illustrates. That’s what he was explaining to his disciples on that night when he washed their feet – and on a hundred other occasions such as the day when Jesus called them together and said to them:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.

*“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV)*

“You have to give up to go up,” Jesus was saying. “You have to lose in order to win.”

It’s a universal spiritual law. It’s how things work in this world because that’s who God Himself is in His character.

About Marriage

So, I know some of you are thinking “that’s really cool; thanks for explaining that to us, Rick, but what does this have to do with marriage? How does this apply to me and my spouse (or my potential spouse)?”

Here’s the deal, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the news about who he was and what he had done began to spread all over the Roman Empire. And thousands of men and women heard that news and believed. They became Christians. And they, just like us, began to wonder how this faith in Christ was supposed to impact everyday life, specifically in their families and even more specifically, in their marriages. I mean, it was great news that God had done something amazing in the life of Jesus and in the body of Jesus and in his resurrection. And this really cool thing is going to happen at the end of time – we’re all going to get raised; we’re all going to get new bodies just like him. “That’s really wonderful but what about now?” they wondered.

So, the Apostle Paul went around preaching and teaching and writing letters about “the now.” And it always followed the same basic form, whether it was preaching or writing. First, he would remind them of who Jesus was and what He did and how sinful men and women like them (and us) were saved by grace through faith and not anything they did themselves to earn God’s forgiveness and acceptance. And *then*, after he made that very clear to people (because we kind of get that confused), he would say, “OK, now here’s the implication for everyday life,” and he’d go on to explain it.

And sometimes he would explain that in generic terms. For instance, he wrote to the Philippians (and this actually precedes that passage I read earlier about Jesus “emptying himself”) ...

Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had ...
Philippians 2:4-5 (NET)

... which, as we have seen, was to willingly give up his rights; to take the role of a servant; and to choose to lose his life in order to receive it back.

And sometimes, Paul would get very specific about marriage and family. For example, to the Ephesians he started out by writing ...

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And before I read what he wrote next, let me say that you should probably remember that phrase because *it is the one simple rule*; it’s the universal spiritual law, the high-leverage principle applied not only to marriage but to all family relationships. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

In fact, it’s so important that I’m going to ask you to read it out loud with me. Could we all do that together? Ready? “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

So, what does submitting to one another look like in a marriage? You might be sorry you asked! This is why I said that this rule might be a secret but it certainly isn’t simple.

Remember in the movie when Lady Jocelyn told William that in order to win her he had to lose? Her explanation to him revealed why it would be so difficult for him. She said, “Instead of winning to honor me with *your* high reputation” (which primarily benefitted him and not her) “I want you to act against your normal character. Losing is a much keener test of your love.”

And here’s why: “Losing would contradict your self-love and losing would show your obedience to your lover and not to yourself.”

Submitting to her, giving up his rights to pursue and win the championship would contradict the natural love and concern he had for himself and his own well-being. It would show that he was more interested in *her* wishes and *her* well-being.

Now, obviously, that’s expressed from the woman’s point of view but, when Paul writes about it, he applies it to both spouses. And when you read what he wrote you can see that it clearly does contradict what men and women both naturally perceive to be in the best interest of their own well-being.

For wives, this means submit to your husband as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. Ephesians 5:22-24 (NLT)

It's totally unnatural for a woman to unconditionally respect her husband as being over her in any way.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

It's totally unnatural for a man to unconditionally love his wife and make her flourishing the goal of his life (instead of all the other goals that men naturally have).

And just to be clear, because this passage sometimes causes people a lot trouble when they read this, when Paul talks about the husband being the head over the wife as Jesus is the head of the church, you need to remember that Jesus was not (and is not) interested in being an authoritarian dictator. As head of the church he is the source of life – creating the environment in which we are saved and in which we can grow and flourish. That's the role of the husband, and it requires the husband to submit to his wife in the same way Jesus had to submit and lay down his life in order for the husband to pull it off.

The Source of Power

And it's unnatural, and it's hard. But this is the one not-so-simple rule that will transform you as a person, whether you're the husband or the wife, and therefore potentially everything about your marriage (and your other relationships).

I remember several years ago talking with a man who was quite a bit older than I was and who had been very happily married for many years. At one point I said to him, "if you had the opportunity to give people just one piece of advice about marriage, what would it be?"

He didn't even hesitate. He said, "I just wrote a letter to a relative who's getting married and I'll tell you what I said right after this next shot." (We were golfing). He said, "My advice would be to always put the other person first. Put their needs ahead of your own." Submit to them, he was saying.

And then he added – and this is very important, "*When you put the other person first they turn around and start putting you first and that's when it gets to be a lot of fun.*"

What he was saying was that when you start to change for the better, your relationships change for the better. And, it's more fun. You lose your life in order to find your life.

And I agreed with him because I remembered, and still do, very vividly, what I considered the defining moment of my marriage, when things dramatically changed for the better for both Jetta and I and became “more fun.” We’d been married 10 years and we were having tension over the usual things that people have at about the 10-year point: money, sex, kids, in-laws, jobs, expectations. And we were sitting in a parking lot in Lufkin, TX, where my wife is from, and this tension had been building for years, and we were yelling at each other. I remember thinking at one point, “there is no solution to this because, everything she is saying is right. She has her ways and I have my ways. And this isn’t a question of morals, it’s just this is how she wants to do things and this is how I want to do things. I’m as right as she is and she’s as right as I am. And I’m so sick of how she wants to do it and she’s so sick of how I’m doing it, and we were just yelling and screaming. And all of a sudden it hit both of us - this is where people get divorced. This is when you start talking about the “D” word. And when it hit us, it was like, “whoa, we better cool it off here.”

And at that point, I felt God reminding me of this verse because, when we got married, some wonderful soul gave us a little plaque that has this verse on it: submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. It hangs in our house and has been in every house we’ve been in since we’ve been married. And I remember it was like God was saying to me, “You need to remember that verse. What that means is, you need to submit to her. You need to learn to do things her way. You need to learn to think about kids, sex, money, in-laws, jobs, expectations her way. And you need to give up the right to be right.”

“You’ve got to be kidding. Lord, how in the world can I do that?”

It was a struggle that went on. And I’m sure Jetta would tell you her side of this story. But, for me, it was like God said:

1. “Someone has to go first in this and it might as well be you. You’re the head of your family. You’re the source. You’re the one responsible to create the environment in which your wife and your children can flourish. You need to go first.”
2. The second thought that came to me was the second part of that one simple rule and it finally made sense to me.

Let’s look at it again ... Paul wrote:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And that’s very important. Paul wasn’t saying “now suck it up boys and girls. Just do what doesn’t come natural to you. Come on, you can do it!”

Instead he was saying, “Remember everything I just wrote to you about how Jesus gave himself,

submitted himself totally and completely to save you? Remember that? Let your awe at that and at him” (which is what reverence means) “so completely transform and fill your thinking that you find yourself more and more able to do that which is unnatural, that which is against your character; so that, if you are a wife, you find that you can actually respect your husband – even when he may not be acting respectably; and if you are a husband you can find yourself unconditionally loving your wife – even when she is not acting lovable in that moment.”

“That’s what Jesus did for you. He loved you and he respected you when you were not loveable, when you were not respectable. That’s what he did for you,” Paul was saying. “And because He did it for you, you are now empowered more and more to do that for others.”

Friends, I’ll just tell you, I’m glad all of you are here on Easter Sunday. I really am. But this is why it is so important that we build our lives, more than just one Sunday a year and even more than once a week, in an environment of grace, understanding the Cross and the Resurrection; and more than simply understanding it, that we actually begin to experience this grace that God has showered on us in Jesus as an everyday, ever-present reality in our life. Your life has got to come out of this. “We love,” the Apostle John wrote, “because He first loved us.” If we’re going to be able to share and do these unnatural things it’s because we’ve received these things from God already.

So this morning as we close, I challenge you, if you are married, to ponder how well you are submitting to your spouse – how well you are putting their needs ahead of your own. But more than that, I want for you to know and experience this grace of God that was so vividly and visibly given to us when Jesus submitted Himself to us for our benefit.

So let me pray for you to that end.

Feature – Dancing in the Minefields

CLOSING COMMENTS

Did you know that marriage researchers have determined the single greatest factor in marriages that fail? If you come back next week, I’ll tell you what that factor is ... and I’ll also tell you how the Good News about Christ can help you not only avoid that but overcome it and turn it into a positive force in all your relationships.

Until then ... go have a great rest of your day ... and Happy Easter!

Endnotes

¹ I’m referring to Phillip Phillip’s hit Gone, Gone, Gone

