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**Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World**  
**Message: Making Your Marriage Work**

**Transcribed Message**  
**November 17, 2019**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Sunday school teacher asked the pastor to come and share with the children about marriage. Thinking that you can't begin too early, the pastor was glad to do that. So he came in to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class and he thought it might be good to begin with a question. He asked the children, "Does anybody know what Jesus said about marriage?" No sooner had he asked the question then a little hand shot up and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Well, none of us, whether we're single or married, better lay claim to the fact that we know everything about marriage because that would certainly be a false claim, wouldn't it? We come this morning to the second study in this larger topic of the home and the family. We're looking this morning at this matter of making your marriage work. Let's look this morning at all marriages require work. Good marriages and not so good marriages all call for commitments, for determination, and for effort.

Before we look at the outline, I want to say something to those of you who are single because while this message is directed at those who are married, almost all of these principles apply to any relationship in life. It isn't that those of you who are not married are not going to hear anything this morning that would be applicable to your situation. I think the second thing that I would suggest and offer is to those who are single and thinking about the possibilities of marriage, understand first of all that being single is nothing of a curse. It, in fact, according to Paul is in many respects a blessing. It's a gift that God gives to certain people. While the majority may get married, there are those that God has given that special calling, that special gift to remain single and that's a good state to be in he says in 1 Corinthians 7. If you're going to marry, then settle for nothing less than a Christ-follower. Don't bring your standard down any lower than this person has to be a believer in Jesus Christ. I think to add to that not just a believer in Christ, you want somebody who's going to be passionate about Christ, who will be

passionate about the gospel, who is going to be passionate about their pursuit and their walk with God. Those are kind of the guiding principles. I think the last thing is to make certain that they're free to marry. Paul addresses that in 1 Corinthians 7. we live in a broken and fallen world, and everybody isn't free to marry. I am at times surprised as I talk to someone who's contemplating or involved in a relationship, it's been more than a few occasions that they have actually said something like well, they're almost finished with their divorce. Their divorce is almost finalized and concluded. That's not being free to marry. There are other specific things that Paul speaks to in that regard. Why as a follower of Christ do we want anything less than the very best that God has for us? You as a single person hold out for the very best that God has. And that is a passionate follower of Jesus Christ who is as committed as you are to the things of God and to the Word of God and God will bring blessing into your life.

Let's look at three eternal perspectives as you look at your outline this morning. Three essential perspectives. First of all, our marriages are lived out in the world that does not function as God originally intended. We all acknowledge that we live in a fallen world. We live in a broken world. We're all a part of that. If your goal in marriage is simply to be happy, then you're going to be disappointed because God has a different goal for you in your marriage. The goal that God has for you in your marriage is He wants to use that relationship, which is the closest of human relationships, to bring transformation and change into your life. He's going to use your spouse to help you do that. It is called sanctification and it happens every day that we submit ourselves to God and to His Word and to His truth. The goal dare not be simply happiness because God has a much grander goal in mind and that is that He would transform us into the likeness of Christ and to holiness.

Secondly, marriage is the union of two imperfect people. It is the union of two imperfect people. If you're married, that's not news. You know that's the world that we all live in. The best that any of us can hope for if we're looking for someone to spend the rest of our life with, is to find another imperfect person. That's the only type that's available. That's all that there is in our world, those who are imperfect. We talked a couple weeks ago about the fact that there are no perfect families. Well, we can say the same thing about marriage. There are no perfect marriages. You might look around and

think of the deficiencies within your marriage, and you might be comparing yourself to somebody else and thinking somebody else has it so much better than you do. You need to realize that they've got many of the same struggles that you do. It's how we handle and how we respond to those that is important. We each bring something into the marriage relationship that is counter to what God wants to do in that relationship and it's called our sin nature. The more we yield to that and the less we yield to the Word and to Christ, the more difficult our journey is. That's why speak so much of having a Christ-centered home, a gospel-centered home, a Christ-centered marriage because that needs to be the focal point.

Then thirdly, God's grace is always at work. God's grace is always available. His grace is always at work. That's the good news. God is always working in us and for us. He is faithful. We're never left alone. We're not on our own. That's why there's always hope for any and every marriage because God is not finished. He is not through. He is going to continue to do that good work in our life, in our marriage, in our family. Our God is a redeeming God. He is a pursuing God. He is a saving God. He is a transforming God. and that's where we need to look and that's the encouragement that we need. We can be grateful and thankful that God never gives up on us. We can trust Him with all of those issues. So let's look this morning at keeping it going.

We're going to look at the five principles first of all that hurt a marriage. Five things that always hurt a marriage. We're going to begin by saying the first thing is having an unresponsive heart to what God says. Proverbs 28 verses 13 and 14: "Whoever conceals his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity." Now, my friends, that is a terrible place for anybody to be whether you're married or whether you're single. To be in a place where your heart is unresponsive to what God says is just simply a terrible place to be. It puts us in great jeopardy. Sometimes in marriage we face difficulties and struggles. Marriage is seasonal. We go through those times where life seems to be more challenging than perhaps at other times. Our heart begins to harden if we're not careful towards our spouse. When our heart begins to harden towards our partner, very often our heart begins to harden towards God. I think the cause/effect of that is because while

our heart is being hardened towards our husband or wife, we know what it is that God is telling us to do and we don't want to do that. We want to operate out of the flesh because they're operating out of the flesh, and we want to respond the way they're responding because that's what they deserve just as we're receiving it.

This process unfolds in which our heart hardens against our spouse and our heart begins to harden towards the Word of God. Proverbs 13:15 – “Good understanding gives favor but the way of the transgressor is hard.” We looked at that a couple of weeks ago with regard to the family. Psalm 95:8 – “Don't harden your heart as Israel did at Meribah.” Meribah was a historical place and Israel faced a decision as to whether they would obey God or go their own way. They went their own way. God said at that moment when they heard the truth and they knew the truth and they rejected the truth, their hearts were hardened against God.

1 Peter 3:7 is a word that speaks in some respect to both husband and wife but it speaks specifically to the husband. Live with your wife in an understanding way. Peter says as you do that, do it so that your prayers are not hindered. There is evidently a time in the life specific to husbands, Peter is saying, when your heart is hardened to the things of God and you're not sensitive to the Spirit of God and to the voice of God's Spirit and to the truth of God's Word. As you find yourself in that condition, Peter warns us that our very prayer life is hindered because of it. So guys can be praying their hearts out for something to be happening in their life, and if their heart is hardened to the truth of God's Word, Peter says their prayers are hindered. Unresponsive heart to what God says.

Secondly, unresolved conflict. Unresolved conflict. Proverbs 18:19 – “A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city and quarreling is like the bars of the castle.” Just put a different word in there. Instead of a brother, put a husband offended is more unyielding than a strong city, a wife offended is more unyielding than a strong city and quarreling is like the bars of the castle. It's like you're putting up barriers. You can just visualize this, can't you? You're putting up barriers between yourself and this other person. There is a wall there. There's bars over a window or over a door. In previous studies, we noted that the source of that is sometimes anger. In chapter 15

and verse 18: "A hot tempered person stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."

Or how about Proverbs 13:10? "By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom." What is insolence? Have you ever been insolent? Insolence is like being rude, being disrespectful, being overbearing. Anybody ever been insolent towards their spouse? Okay, I'm the only one. To be insolent, to be overbearing, to be disrespectful, to be rude. We have these warnings that Proverbs tells us that move us towards contention and strife. We know from previous studies that what Proverbs tells us to do in that circumstance is to stop it early. Remember Proverbs 17 and in verse 14: "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out." Or chapter 20 and verse 3: "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife but every fool will be quarreling." There's another solution that is offered and I like this one. It is in Proverbs 18:18. It says, "The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders." I like that. Powerful contenders. We're talking about marriage, right? We're talking about the strife that takes place between a husband and wife. Here is the Carlonian paraphrase of that. Get a coin and toss it. Do a coin toss. The lot. He says a lot puts an end to quarrels. So what I like to do is get out a special coin that Bonnie and I have. When we have an argument or quarrel I like to get this coin out and I say to her heads I win and tails you lose. It has solved a lot of our problems. You'll think about that one later and laugh.

An unforgiving spirit, thirdly. Look at an unforgiving spirit. Again, what is so often behind an unforgiving spirit? It's kind of what we've already talked about. It's a hardened heart towards each other, towards spiritual things. Anger, pride, selfishness. Listen to 19:11 – "Good sense makes one slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook an offense." Here's somebody that's refusing to forgive. When we refuse to forgive, we place ourselves in the same spiritual jeopardy that we referenced at the very beginning. To have a hard heart to spiritual things, to the truth of God's Word places us in spiritual jeopardy. If you have an unforgiving spirit towards your husband or wife, you have placed yourself in a place of spiritual jeopardy. Remember what Jesus said in the prayer that he offered in Matthew 6. We often refer to the Lord's prayer. Verse 12: "And forgive our debts as we also forgive our debtors." Remember verse 14: "For if you forgive

others their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” When we looked at this a year or so ago, remember we said this isn’t earning God’s favor. This isn’t earning God’s forgiveness. You do this and God will do this for you. No, the key of that is back in verse 12 –“Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” What Jesus says in verse 14 is if you’re not forgiving others, then you’re asking God to treat you the same way that you’re treating other people. If you don’t have a heart to forgive your husband or your wife or some other person, then you’re placing yourself in spiritual jeopardy because you’re basically saying God, I want You to treat me the way I am treating other people. We don’t want to be there.

Number four. An uncaring attitude. Chapter 18 verse 1: “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” Here is someone who seldom if ever expresses their feelings. Here is someone who seldom if ever expresses their appreciation. They live a basically self-centered life. They view everything through the lens of what’s in it for me. How do I benefit from this? And all of this just communicates to somebody significant in their life I don’t need you. I’m fine without you. I can do okay without you. I can get along just fine. There’s no sense of oneness there. Denial of the very truth of Genesis when Jesus said the whole idea of marriage is to become one. To become one – not just physically, but emotionally, spiritually, and in all the ways that God designs in this marriage relationship for us to experience partnership and togetherness and to complement each other. But an uncaring attitude is basically to live a self-centered life.

Then the last one. Unreasonable demands. Unreasonable demands. Pretty much the opposite of Proverbs that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. We’ll look at it again in just a minute about rejoicing in the wife of your youth and taking joy in that. Instead of accepting each other the way God made them, the way God designed them, we spend our life trying to change them into the person we want them to be. We know how well that goes. It doesn’t go very good at all. It’s not God’s intent. It is not God’s design for us to do that in each other’s lives. He does that.

Bonnie and I knew a couple 30 years ago that had been married for over 50 years. They had a wonderful marriage. She was an incredibly energetic person. She

was always needing to do something. Even if you're just sitting in the living room and talking she had to be doing something. She was high energy and a go-getter. Her husband was very much the opposite of that. He was a laid-back guy. He was very successful in what he did. He was a successful businessman but he just had a slower switch. He just moved through life at a different pace. We had only been married about five or six years at that point and she told us one of the keys to a successful marriage is don't try to change another person's speed. Don't try to change the speed with which God has made them and designed them. You can apply that to 100 other things as well, can't you? We're all made different for a reason and for a purpose. There's nothing that we can do to change that other person in that way. So there are 5 things that hinder a marriage relationship and keep it from advancing and moving forward and being all that God would have it to be.

Now let's look at something of the mirror opposite of those. Let's look at five things that help us in marriage. The first one, not surprisingly, is that we embrace the truth and we refuse to listen to other solutions. We embrace the truth. Go back to Proverbs chapter 4 verse 25: "Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left. Turn your foot away from evil. My son, be attentive to my wisdom. Incline your ear to my understanding that you may keep discretion and your lips may guard knowledge." Embracing the truth. There's a wonderful statement that Peter makes in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 13. Listen to what Peter says: "Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Prepare your mind for action. Be sober minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is just a matter of welcoming God's truth into our life. It's a matter of embracing.

People, we have the most amazing book in all the world right here. This is a handbook for life. We've said the whole point of Proverbs is to walk in wisdom. And what is wisdom? It's to live life the way God sees it. It's to see ourselves and to see life the way God does. He gives this blueprint for how to live life as well, how to live life successfully. To our great benefit and to our great advantage, we welcome this truth

into our life. It is the opposite of where we started in terms of hindering and not welcoming that truth. Our trust is in the confidence of who God is. We're committed to walking in truth. We're committed to our marriage. We're not committed to an outcome that we have predetermined and foreordained in our mind as to what this is to look like and how it's to be. No, we're committed to the marriage relationship. Period. And we welcome, we embrace and we bring God's truth into our mind and we walk in obedience to that.

I'm always amazed at how much advice is available to people who are finding themselves in a difficult marriage. I'm even more amazed at how much of that advice that is poor comes from so-called Christian friends. Here you have somebody that's already struggling and instead of having a believing friend come into their life and point them to the truth, as difficult as that might be, they are offering alternatives that are contrary to the Word of God. It shouldn't be. If you're not sure of the counsel that somebody is giving you as to whether it's true or not, as you hear this coming to you from a friend, maybe just pause and graciously say thank you. Can you possibly show me in the Bible where that is that you're talking about? Because very often those solutions that are being offered are based on a goal of finding simply happiness within that marriage rather than submitting to the transforming work that God wants to do, to create a greater holiness in our walk with Him. We need to be careful in that regard ourselves. God will honor your commitment to truth. God will honor your commitment to His Word even in the midst of a difficult marriage.

Secondly, maintain a humble heart. Maintain a humble heart. Instead of what often leads to unresolved conflict with pride and selfishness and all of those things, maintain a humble heart. Let's go back again to the Proverbs 18 and verse 12: "Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." Then all the way over to chapter 29 and in verse 23: "Once pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." We know not just from Proverbs but we know from other places in Scripture that God tells us that He actually opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. It seems like this is a no-brainer, isn't it? Why would we want to stake out a position based on personal pride rather than walking in humility before God and before each other? God has already told us in advance that He's going to resist us if our heart



attitude is one of pride. I'm going to resist you. But if you walk in humility and you have this teachable spirit, then I'm going to help you to advance in your walk. There are very few conflicts that can't be resolved if you have two people sit down and they both have a humble heart about trying to resolve the issue. It may not be easy to do, but it certainly leads to a better outcome than to have a spirit of pride. Pride causes us to be intractable. It causes us to take our eyes away from the very solutions that God is putting before us.

Number three. Extending kindness. Extending kindness. I did not know until later in the week but this last Wednesday was National Kindness Day. There's an actual day that is specifically on the calendar that we are to be extraordinarily kind to each other. Here's a good word for us. Proverbs would agree with that, only it would have a different take. It would say don't wait for Wednesday, November 13. Just do it every day! Proverbs 11:17 – “A man who is kind benefits himself but a cruel man hurts himself.” A couple pages over in 15:1 -- “A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Chapter 16 verse 21: “The wise of heart is called discerning and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it but the instruction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise makes a speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Ephesians 4, we already know, tells us to be kind one to another. In fact, that whole passage in Ephesians starts off by telling us to submit to the Holy Spirit. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. Then he ends by saying be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. There is all kinds of instruction here. A willingness to say, out of this spirit of kindness, I was wrong. I'm sorry. You were right. I would suggest that marriage can be transformed just by taking this one principal and seeking to act out of kindness towards your spouse. What would happen, guys, if every day you said to your wife: honey, is there something I can do today that would be of extra help to you? Now go slow, guys. I don't want to do a lot of hospital visitation because of cardiac arrest issues. But wouldn't that be a transformative behavior if we really took this to heart and just simply applied this principle as a matter of extending kindness to each other.

If there should be anything that is true of the people of God, it should be true that we're gracious people, that we're kind people. I've had some interesting conversations in the last couple of days centering around this. In fact, one of them was in our Wednesday night study. We're reading a book on unlikely converts and how God works in evangelism in bringing people to Himself. The bottom line is we're all unlikely converts because we all need the same grace and the same mercy. But it's been a very encouraging book just to see how it is that God works in our lives and how He uses us. The chapter we read on Wednesday was this very thing. It was to be kind, to just bring as a Christian, as a Christ-follower into all of these places where we conduct our life and business to bring the spirit of kindness. That's transformative in our world today because there's not a lot of kindness going on.

The convicting thing was because we had kind of talked within that larger setting of the whole LGBTQ movement and some of the things that are happening in our culture around that issue. I asked the guys in the class on that particular issue: How would you rate, how would you grade the church at large in terms of bringing a spirit of kindness to people who are created and made in the image of God just like all of the rest of us? If one is we're borderline hate and 10 is we couldn't be any kinder or more loving, where do you think the church is? You can just come up with a number in your head, but I'll tell you the numbers that were thrown out in our small group were five and lower. There's something wrong about that. As the people of God, we must bring a spirit of kindness and humility and love to a group of people that clearly needs it just as we needed it from Christ. One of the distinguishing things that should be true of our marriages is that at least we're kind to each other. Kindness would go a long way. So we extend kindness to each other.

Number four. Enjoy who God has given you. enjoy who God has given you. We've already noted this, but back in Proverbs 5 it's worth going back to again beginning at verse 15: "Drink water from your own cistern. flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." We talked about just that matter

of joy within marriage. That's this principle here. Enjoy who God has given to you. In this specific context and this specific application, He is obviously talking about a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. One of the things that God has given to us in that regard is one of the greatest protections in our marriage. If you have a mutually satisfying sexual relationship, it's like putting barriers up, Proverbs says. It's like putting a guard around your marriage. It is a means of protection. All you have to do is talk to marriage counselors because one of the very first things to go in a marriage that is doing the first five things rather than the second five things is this matter of intimacy. It is called intimacy for reason. Just as we have laid out in Genesis that the husband and wife were both naked and they were not ashamed, there is this sense of transparency. There is this sense of openness. When you're doing the first five on a regular basis in your marriage and you're hindering your marriage in all of those ways and others, then I can assure you that one of the first things that goes in your marriage relationship is any kind of intimacy. That's just the reality of what happens in our lives. That shouldn't come as any surprise.

There are other ways, of course, we enjoy each other – time together, conversation with each other, laughter. Don't take yourself so serious. Introduce humor frequently into your marriage, your family, your life. Proverbs agrees with that. Proverbs says that. That doesn't come from me. Chapter 17 and verse 22: “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” Back in 15:30 he says, “The light of the eyes rejoices the heart and good news refreshes the bones.” I tried to think of just a few words that would capture this. I tried to think of something totally original that would capture this point and this is what I came up with. You can see if it does. Live, laugh and love. We've seen that all over the place. It's good stuff. It fits in with a lot of things that Proverbs says. Live and enjoy life. Laugh. Understand the work of God in your life is always to advance you into greater things within the context of marriage.

The last one. Don't underestimate God's love. Don't underestimate God's love. We sang about it this morning. Two out of those three songs specifically came to mind as we were singing about this very point, just the amazing love of God at work in our lives, this selfless love that Peter talks about. Peter talks in 1 Peter 3, one of the toughest assignments I think that there is, being in a marriage but being alone

spiritually. Specifically in that passage he is talking to wives remember. He says wives, live this godly life of pure conduct before your husband so that you can win him even without a word. That is only possible in the power of God's Spirit. There's something there that Peter is pointing us to in terms of this matter of don't underestimate the power of God's love. Paul talks about it obviously in 1 Corinthians 13. He gives us this incredible chapter on what *agape* love looks like in our life and its ability to impact those around us. In Ephesians 5 we have the same thing: husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. If wives look at the assignment of being in submission to your husband as difficult, the difficulty of that assignment is taken care of by a husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Here is the power of God's love that He intends for us to share. My friends, all marriages require work. If you're in a good marriage, it takes work. It's because of work. If you're in a marriage that is struggling, guess what? It requires work. It requires a lot of determination, commitment, effort, calling out to God for His enabling grace and prayer.

What do we take away? The time to start is today. The time to start is now. Don't stay stuck. There is a choice other than being in a bad marriage. The choice isn't divorce. The choice is God, I want to begin today to implement some of these principles from Proverbs that will allow You to be transforming my marriage. The plan to follow is God's. He has given us the blueprint all through His Word. The person that needs to change is you and me. We don't need to be focused on the other person and what things need to change in their life as much as we need to be focused on our own self. The best way to do that is to focus on the gospel. To focus on the gospel. To focus on what that gospel has done in our life. To focus on the grace of God that was needed and is still needed in each of our lives. This transforming work that God needs to do. This rescue of us from the penalty of sin and the power of sin and ultimately one day the very presence of sin is a work that we submit ourselves to as we live out the gospel every day. That's the calling that God has placed upon our life. That grace is available for every one of us. It comes to us through Jesus Christ. It comes to us because of the cross. It was on that cross that Jesus died and it was there that God put all of my sin and all of yours and all of ours upon Jesus. He did that so that we could have this relationship with Him now, today, in which we can be called His children, His sons and

His daughters by faith in Christ. That's what God wants to do. He wants to start today. He wants us to follow, embrace, welcome His truth into our life. He wants us to recognize that He wants to transform and change us and then see how God changes our perspective.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You again for the principles of Your Word that show us how it is that we can live in such a way that we walk in obedience to You and to enjoy harmony and fellowship with You. Lord, when we do that we know that we enjoy a harmony in all of the other relationships of life. To the extent that we can, we want to do good in every one of these relationships. We want to call out to You and ask that You would change us and that You would bring us more into agreement and alignment with Your Word, with Your truth. Give to us soft hearts, sensitive hearts. Give to us humble hearts so that we can trust You and walk with You and see the transforming work of Your Spirit in our lives. Father God, we thank You for this gospel. I pray if there is somebody here this morning that has not trusted Jesus as their Savior that Your Holy Spirit will open their eyes and give them understanding of this good news. The working that they're doing to make their way to heaven is never going to be enough, but what Jesus did is enough. If we believe that and trust that You give us eternal life, we move from death to life, from darkness to light. We thank You, in Jesus's name, Amen.