

“Building Healthy Foundations”

[VIDEO: *Shall We Dance*, chap 9, 50:13-51:42]

What is marriage really all about? What in all relationships, makes them strong weather you are married, single, divorced, never plan on being married? So many relationships and marriages fail because we're not prepared or equipped or skilled in making them work. When we enter into relationships we often set ourselves up with unrealistic expectations that end up hurting us and our relationships in the long run. We set up expectations that take a long time to work through.

Is it any wonder that on any given day in almost every county in America there is **[SLIDE...]** **one divorce filed for every marriage?** Is it any wonder that some sociologists tell us that **[SLIDE: ADD TO PREVIOUS...]** **only one in four married couples say they're extremely happy.** **[SLIDE: ADD TO PREVIOUS...]** **3 out of four say they're just moderately happy to extremely unhappy.**

Sociologists also tell us that for the younger baby boomers and generation Xers, that's about 60 percent of our church, we're the first generations where at least half of us will have grown up in divorced families. You know, when I talk with couples before they get married it's almost always the case that one or both of them have come from a parents that have gone through a divorce. That means that many people who are getting ready to get married didn't have an effective role model for what a solid marriage looks like. If you take into account those people from homes where their parents stayed together but were extremely unhappy, that number goes through the roof.

There are very few role models of what marriage ought to look like, what a relationship between husband and wife can be at its best. It's amazing that anybody stays married at all! I have pastored a lot of people through marital difficulties and there is a lot of pain, deep pain.

Looking at these kinds of facts, knowing the pain that many of you have been through, looking at my own family where my parents are divorced, I think, surely there is something that we can do about this! If the church doesn't teach people what marriage ought to be like, to set up role models and examples for people who are thinking about getting married, if we don't teach and instruct and inspire people and guide people and strengthen people, if the church doesn't do it, who will?! There are a lot of self-help books and tapes out there on this subject, but if self-help books were able to help, they would have done something by now. I believe the church has to address this issue.

Now, this series on marriage and relationships is not just for married people. Of course, this is for people who are married and want to make their marriages stronger—maybe you'll learn about that for the very first time. But this series of sermons is also for anyone one of you who thinks that someday down the road you might get married. You may be divorced, you may be widowed, you may be a teenager who will someday think about marriage down the road. Or maybe you'd just like to understand the opposite sex a little better. If you fit into any of these categories this series is for you.

As we start this series on building stronger marriages and relationships this sermon today is the starting point...the foundation for the rest of the series. If we're going to understand the importance of marriage and how all this fits into God's plan, we have to begin at the beginning. Let's look at the Bible and see what God's intention was for this relationship between man and woman.

We need to look at the beginning of the first book of the Bible. The book called Genesis. I'm not going to read it to you, instead I'm going to tell it to you like it was told and retold long before it was ever written down. It was passed orally from one generation to another before anybody ever wrote it down. Listen closely.

In the beginning God scooped up a couple of handfuls of mud from the earth and started to shape it and mold it--like a kid with playdough. He started to form a human being, a man. With every little stroke, a pinch here and there, it started to look more and more like what God intended, like a creature. Finally God finished and breathed into what he'd created and filled it with the breath of life and the creature became a living human being, created in the image of God, with a soul, a spirit.

God took this creature man and named him Adam, which means, man of the earth, and put him in the most beautiful garden called Eden. It was a place filled with every good thing a human could ever want. Babbling brooks with the freshest, purist water, every good thing to eat for nourishment. It was paradise. But God watched this creature, this son, and realized that there was an empty place in the man's life. He wandered around aimlessly, as men are prone to do. There was something remarkable missing so the Lord decided to create a companion, a helper, for the man. First he created the birds of the air and brought them to the man and the man named them all, but none of them was a suitable companion.

Then the Lord created all the animals and the man named them and looked at them, but again, none of them were suitable companions. So the Lord caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and he took a rib from the man's side and closed up the opening. God said, "I'll make a helper, a companion for this man." The Lord formed and fashioned a second human being—some would say a new and improved version of the first one--and brought her to the man. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and said, "This is what I've been longing for. She's flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones. Out of man she was taken so she shall be called woman." Then the Bible tells us, therefore a man shall leave father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall be one flesh. The man and the woman, they were in the garden and they were naked, but they were not ashamed.

This is the story that provides a foundation for the relationship between men and women and why we are the way we are. Jesus even goes back to this story when he explains what it means to be married. Here's what we can learn from this story, these foundational things.

[SLIDE: "1. God designed us to be helpers and companions to our spouse"] First, God designed each of us to be helpers and companions to the one we're married to or engaged to. Now, this teaches us more than just about marriages. It teaches us about men and women in general too. It teaches us that we're meant to complement one another and to stand along side one another. This teaches us that our purpose in marriage is to be companions to each other, to be helpers to each other. In Ecclesiastes it says this: **[SLIDE...]** **"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NIV). We are created to be companions and helpers to one another.

Now, notice that there's one thing the Bible **doesn't** tell us about the man and woman. It doesn't tell us that they were created to be unbelievably in love with one another. You see, being in love is a wonderful **byproduct** of what God intended. But in our culture we put way too much emphasis on being in love, on that emotional state of mind and it hurts in the end because when that feeling mellows we're confused, we're hurt, and our relationships suffer. Instead we're told that God designed marriage with a purpose in mind, and that is that we would be helpers and companions to one another. The being in love part is a by product, a feeling that ebbs and flows.

The **second** thing we can learn from this scripture is that when we think about marriage, we have to understand that **[SLIDE: “2. Marriage is a calling from God.”]** marriage is a calling from God! God is saying this is not something to enter into lightly, this is a lifetime commitment. And Christians need to know this fact: not everybody is called by God to be married! In fact there are probably a lot of people, a lot of people, that God’s called to be single, but they feel a constant pressure to get married from family and friends and society, so they get married and they’re miserable because that’s not their calling. The norm in the Bible is marriage, but it’s also clear that being single is a calling.

Then there are a lot of people who rush into marriage because they feel so in love, their hearts pound and their palms sweat and they think that’s it! “Whoa, I’ve got to get married to this foxy lady or this hunk of a man!” Heart pounding palms sweating in the presence of the god or goddess. You know, the problem is that that same stuff happens when you watch the Chiefs and Broncos play. It happens when you’re watching a good movie. It happens when you’re almost in a car crash. It’s an exhilarating feeling, but that doesn’t mean you’re called to marry the Chiefs or the Broncos, or spend your life watching movies! Or go looking to crash your car!

Single people, teenagers, realize these two things: God may be calling you to be single and that is perfectly OK. But if God is calling you to be married, he’s calling you to a certain person and he or she might not be the one who makes your heart pound and palms sweat. He or she **will** be the person who will be your companion through thick and thin. The person who will complement you, be there by your side, lift you when you fall, warm you when you’re cold, inspire you when you feel like you’ve got nothing left. When Janet and I first met, it was definitely NOT love at first sight. We didn’t not make each others hearts pound or palms sweat. That did come later, after we realized how we complemented one another and that God was calling us to be a team together.

Prior to meeting Janet I spent 5 years of my life dating someone. It was one of those things where I assumed that just because we’d been dating for that amount of time we were going to get married, even though I was miserable! I just assumed that that’s the way relationships were! But I thank God that through the help of some Christian friends I was able to see the painful truth. I went through the pain of realizing that she and I were never meant to be together. It hurt. We ended it. There was pain. In fact, it hurt so bad that I decided then that it would be fine with me to be single the rest of my life. Relationships caused too much pain. So I was determined to stay single...and I was miserable without somebody! What it took me a while to realize is that I wasn’t called to be with that person I’d been dating and I wasn’t called to be single. But when I met the person I was called to be with, I knew it. Janet was the person that God had called me to marry, and Janet was marrying the person she was called to marry. It was a God thing.

You see, so often the problem is that we don’t seek the person who is to be our God-ordained companion, we get side-tracked with somebody who makes our hearts pound and palms sweat and hormones explode! So, you single people, pray and ask God if you’re called to be married, wait patiently—God may seem slow, but he’s always right on time—and if you know you’re called to be married, then pray to God to help you see beyond a nice figure or big muscles or earning potential, to the person who will be your companion.

When God brings two people together he’s saying to the husband, “This woman deserves a man who will be a blessing to her and I have a job description of what husbands should be.” And God says to the woman, “This man deserves a woman who will be a blessing to him and I have a job description for her.” And each person considers that and finally realizes, “Yup! I want the job!” We

answer a calling by God when we say, "I do." The calling is to live in a covenant, to live with this one person for the rest of our lives. To treat them a certain way. To care for them a certain way. To build them up and encourage them in a certain way. Marriage is a calling from God. One of the most sacred callings we can imagine.

Marriage isn't just about how you feel at any given moment, it's a very hard calling that you're accepting. A calling where, when you say, "I do," in the wedding, and I pray the prayer of blessing over you, and the Holy Spirit creates a bond, the Holy Spirit enters in and ordains your union. That doesn't mean that it will be easy every day, in fact there will be very hard days. But it does mean that God's presence can guide and direct you, and through your ordination as a couple, help his kingdom grow in ways it couldn't if you weren't together.

Here is the business of being married: **[SLIDE: "The business of marriage:....LIST THE FOLLOWING IN BULLET POINTS] to bless, to build up, to encourage, to stand alongside, to love sacrificially, to serve faithfully, and most importantly to be a tangible sign of God's presence.**

There's one other quick thing we can learn from this passage and that's that God made us to be a gift to one another. We called to be a gift. You were called to be a gift to your spouse! But you know what, some of us are much better at being a curse than a gift! We're a lot better at destroying than we are at building up. We're better at discouraging than encouraging. We find it easier to pick someone apart than to praise what they're doing right. We get into bad habits, but our calling is to be a gift.

So, does your spouse look at you as gift? Does your spouse thank God for you every single day? Or does your spouse ask for God's strength to make it through one more day with you?! You know, it's tough being a gift! But that's what God has called you to be as a spouse.

I have to end here today, but next week we will continue on focusing on us men and how we can know our God-given job descriptions and move beyond being Mr. Fixit. I'll be talking about what women wish men knew about women. We're going to learn a lot! Because God's desire for us it to have healthy, vibrant, focused relationships with one another. God is concerned about that and cares about that in us and there is something that all of us can do. So next week we'll go deeper. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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