

“Biblical Perspectives on Love, Marriage and Sex. Part 6--Making Love Last a Lifetime.”

Do you know what the shortest sentence in the English language is? It's "I do." But for some people the shortest sentence seems like the longest sentence. It seems like a prison sentence! Well today we're going to be talking about how we can have marriages that stand through the test of time. Marriages that are joy-filled, Christ-centered, and enriching.

Over the last five weeks we've been looking at how we can build healthier relationships and marriages; how we can make them stronger to withstand the storms of life. Today we wrap up this series. We started off by looking at the statistics—for every marriage that is filed there is one divorce filed. The ripples from our broken relationships affect every aspect of our lives and God cares about every aspect of our lives so he cares about our love lives! As Christians we need to address these issues so that if we're called to be married or called to be single we can be obedient to that calling. So today we're going to conclude this series by addressing the issue of how to make love last a lifetime. How to keep the bonds strong and the romance alive.

Now I want you to think about the feelings you had when you first fell in love with somebody. You may have been in high school or middle school or college, but that first time you fell in love with somebody was incredible. Do you remember how you felt?! You couldn't get that person out of your mind. You were completely consumed by them. You wanted to be with them all of the time! These are the sparks that start to fly when you first fall in love.

And, you know, it consumes a lot of time when you fall in love, doesn't it? Do you remember how your friends were mad at you because you stopped spending time with them and were focused on just this one person? You didn't have time for your friends or parents because you were so caught up with that love of your life. You were so head-over-heels in love with them that you would hang on their every word and every deed.

And not only did you hang on every word and deed but you hung all over each other! You couldn't wait to hold hands or put your arms around each other or kiss. You told each other how much you loved one another, and brought little gifts to each other, and went out on dates and were constantly loving and blessing and talking and kissing and holding and on and on and on!!! ...SO, TELL ME, WHAT HAPPENS IN MARRIAGE!

If all this is what it takes to get the sparks flying, why is it that so often right after people get married they don't do that stuff any more?! They stop doing all those things and think that it's enough to just sit down together on the couch and watch their favorite TV shows with a bag of microwave popcorn in between them. They think that somehow that's a bonding experience!

People who express that their marriages are just average say that they go out on a date once every six months, once a year or just once in a while. Think about that for a second. If you went out on a date just once a year with somebody do you think you'd ever get to the point of getting married? I doubt it! You see, we start off one way, and the sparks start flying and then we drop all the stuff that kept the romance alive. Is it any wonder that we fall out of love?

In fact, marriage experts say that in the normal course of a marriage, couples experience at least 7 deaths. These are not physical deaths, they're the times when you wake up in the morning and look over at your spouse laying there. (I'm speaking hypothetically, of course!) You see her or him laying there drooling on the pillow, bad breath hitting you in your face, snoring and you think, "Did I marry this person?!"

There are times when you just can't find the flame any more--there are times when it doesn't seem exciting to be married. Those are called death experiences in marriage and that is when many couples give up, have affairs, and often file for divorce. But listen, we have a God that's bigger than our little death experiences. We have Jesus on our side and he beat death! Jesus didn't only die for you and your eternal soul, he came back from death to live and move your marriage from death to life. He can give you a brand new beginning. So let's talk about how to beat these death experiences through the power of Jesus Christ. Let's talk about how to affair-proof your marriage when those difficult times come, and how rekindle the romance. We'll wrap up talking about God's ideas on romance and sex.

To affair-proof your marriage first we have to understand a couple of things. The first thing we have to understand is that having an affair, or adultery, as the Bible calls it, is a sin. **[SLIDE: "To Affair-proof Your**

Marriage: 1. Understand that adultery is a sin.”] Whenever I do a wedding ceremony I ask each groom this question: “Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, **and forsaking all other be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?”** I ask the bride the same question. You see, faithfulness is a crucial part of the marriage vows. And when we’re unfaithful to our mates we commit the sin of adultery.

We need to understand that it’s never God’s will for you to commit adultery and have an affair. That may seem obvious, but you’d be surprised by the number of times I’ve heard people say things like, “My marriage was miserable and this other person came into my life and I just know God brought them into my life...and we ended up having an affair.” Please know that God wouldn’t do that, and that God never condones adultery. Your marriage may not be happy. It may need serious help. It may not survive. But it is never God’s will for you to have an affair, sexually or emotionally.

James 1:14-15 says this, **[SLIDE...]** **“One is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵ then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15, NRSV).** This means that you are the one who will decide what to do with temptation. When you’re tempted by someone attractive outside your marriage, recognize those feelings when they first start. It’s normal to have them. But decide to push them away rather than let them get in your mind and turn into fantasies that can then lead to devastating actions. Temptation is not sin, but it becomes sin when we feed it with fantasies and then actions. Affair-proof your marriage first by understanding that adultery is a sin and then guard your hearts.

Affair-proofing your marriage also includes meeting your spouses needs. **[SLIDE: add to previous “2. Meet your spouse’s needs.”]** We’ve talked about this through the series but it’s worth repeating. When people’s needs are not being met in marriage they’re more susceptible to having an affair. So get to know your spouse’s needs and do what you can to meet them. When your spouse feels loved by you through your actions and when you’re meeting your spouse’s emotional and sexual needs, the likelihood of an affair is significantly less.

You can also affair-proof your marriage by **[SLIDE: add to previous “3. Invite spouse to help identify threats.”]** inviting your spouse to help you identify potential threats and hold you accountable. There have been a couple of occasions where Janet expressed concerns about the way a particular woman was acting toward me. Janet’s not the jealous type so when she points something like that out, I listen. She understands better than I do how a woman thinks. She would expect me to do the same for her. We watch out for one another and protect each other with accountability.

And finally, to affair-proof your marriage **[SLIDE: add to previous “4. Be smart in your relationships.”]** Don’t spend extended periods of time alone with somebody of the opposite sex. Don’t share intimate stories outside of marriage. If you’re having marriage problems, don’t discuss them with people of the opposite sex. And whatever you do, if you’re attracted to somebody outside of marriage, do not tell that person. Think about it. Because if that person is **not** interested it will be embarrassing and could cause problems in your friendship. And if they do feel the same way, you’ll be headed down the road to an affair.

This leads to the question, “Is there hope for you if you’ve committed adultery?” Is there hope for those of you who are hurting yourselves and others by your behavior? The answer is “Yes,” there is hope through Jesus Christ. God loves you and is willing to wash you clean and make you new. But it’s up to you to remember the vows you made in marriage. Vows you made not only to your mate, but to God when you promised to be faithful.

If you’re having an affair right now, Christ is challenging you to end it today and do whatever you have to get out of that situation. That may mean confessing to your spouse. It may involve quitting your job. It may mean having to move to a new neighborhood. Just know that as you make these changes God will be with you to lead a new life. I’ve known couples whose marriages did not survive an affair, but I know just as many that did survive. It’s important to know that there is hope, even after an affair.

All this is so important to know because of the difficult times that will happen in your marriage. Not **might** happen, but **will** happen. And if you’re aware of what can happen and you do the things that will affair-proof your marriage, you’ll be protected and ready for a rebirth and renewal in your marriage.

Now let's talk about the romance part of making love last a lifetime. Let's talk about intimacy and sex. There are some very important concepts here. The first is this: **[SLIDE: "Sex is God's idea!"]**. God created us as sexual beings. Sex was given as a gift to us for procreation, for pleasure, and for bonding. God meant for it to be a blessing in our lives within the context of marriage. The Bible says this, **[SLIDE...]** **"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4-5, NIV)**. Clearly from scripture God considers this part of our lives to good, to be a blessing.

You see, God created sexual intimacy to deepen our love, create deep emotional bonds between a husband and wife and bring us pleasure. That's what God intended but sometimes it has the opposite effect. Our sex lives can be a source of frustration and even conflict. One problem is that sexual intimacy is rarely like what you see in the movies—especially for newlyweds, particularly if they've not been sexually active before marriage. There's a real blessing and joy in learning how to be intimate together. I believe that the sexual relationship in marriage is like a fine wine that improves with age. And research backs that up.

One survey found that 50% of married couples their 20's, 40's, 50's and 60's rated their sexual relationships as excellent or very good. The highest percentages of those who said their sexual relationships were excellent or very good were in their 60's. What this survey found was that married men in their 30's had the lowest satisfaction levels! Why? Because that's the time when most had children! During their 30's parents are often exhausted from taking care of kids, homes, holding down careers and they have no passion left at the end of the day.

So parents, listen carefully: this is normal. And it is not permanent. Things will get better as research clearly shows. But parents with small children, you need to plan weekends away from the kids on a regular basis. And when you get some time together, talk to each other, seek to meet each other's needs.

From our surveys and research in general, both men and women crave intimacy. Yes, men and women are different sexually--women are more like crock pots and men like microwaves. So we need to understand this about each other and work together in this very important part of our marriages. Paul wrote this, **[SLIDE...]** **"The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again" (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, NRSV)**.

Paul is teaching us that when a man and woman marry, their bodies no longer belong to themselves. The man's body belongs to his wife, and the wife's body belongs to her husband. He's teaching us that husband and wife are to minister to one another through the act of physical intimacy.

You see, Christian love expressed within marriage is about giving, not receiving. This kind of love doesn't look for what it's going to get; it looks for what it can give in order to bless the other. That's the foundation of a satisfying intimate relationship, not the latest techniques or exotic lingerie.

For Christian married couples, affectionate touch, romance and sexual intimacy are opportunities to minister to one another. When we see intimacy as ministry something wonderful happens. As one author wrote: "These acts of [intimacy] become holy. It is in such spiritual acts of self-giving, when we open ourselves to our mates and devote ourselves completely to caring for them in the most vulnerable, beautiful, and personal way possible, that we begin to discover the deeper meaning of physical intimacy."

The authors of the book *Sex in America* discovered in their survey that deeply committed Christians actually had a higher quality of sexual relationships than non-Christians. The authors may have been surprised by that, but we shouldn't be. Because when two people see sexual intimacy as a gift from God, when they guard their hearts, when they see marriage as a sacred calling and see sex as means of self-giving, they discover the quality of sexual intimacy God intended for us to have all along.

I have three suggestions of things you can do that will keep romance alive in your marriage. **[SLIDE: "How to Keep Romance Alive. 1. Demonstrate affection often."]** The first is demonstrate affection often.

Kiss often. Janet and I have a rule that we never leave the house without kissing each other. The other day she was in her car and out in the driveway when she came back in to give me a kiss! Husbands who kiss their wives before going off to work live longer and are healthier than those who don't.

Don't forget to hug each other often and not just quickie hugs, but hold one another. And along with the hug tell each other that you love each other. It has been proven that genuine communication is directly correlated to sexual fulfillment in both men and women. Your sex lives will improve with your communication.

Secondly, develop common interests. **[SLIDE: add to previous, "2. Develop common interests"]** You don't have to do everything together, but find several things that you enjoy doing together. It could be anything—shopping for antiques, walking, refinishing furniture, cooking, decoupage, collecting Elvis memorabilia! Find things to do together besides watching TV and renting movies. It's in sharing in these common interests that you share in non-sexual intimacy that then helps pave the way for the sexual aspects.

The third thing to do to keep romancing one another is to do something spontaneous once in while. **[SLIDE: add to previous, "3. Spontaneity"]** I don't know about you, but on the third Tuesday of every month at 6:30 I'm scheduled to do something spontaneous! We are so guilty of being slaves to our schedules that we do sometimes have to plan spontaneity. Do what it takes! Buy each other little gifts. Write sweet notes. Get flowers for one another. Never stop being creative in romancing each other. Because, you see, romance takes intentionality. It's a very important ministry from one spouse to another and don't take it for granted. Work at it and the rewards will be clear.

My last point in this sermon on making love last a lifetime is very important. A lot of research says that one of the key ingredients for a fulfilling marriage is a shared purpose or meaning between spouses. Unfortunately, way too many of us pursue shared meaning that doesn't last. We pursue goals like becoming wealthy, or have as our primary goals raising kids, or doing civic work. The problem is that these don't last. Once you get the wealth it doesn't offer meaning. Kids grow up and move away. Even civic work can become just busy work if it's just an end in itself. But Christians have something more. They have a calling to serve God together every day and in every part of their lives. In Christian marriage we share a calling to serve God together. We marry as a husband and wife because we believe we can accomplish more in service to God together than we could alone.

Janet's aim in life is serve Christ. She wants to know him and follow his will in every area of her life, including our marriage. My goal is to serve Christ and follow his will in every area of my life, including our marriage. That's our shared vision for our lives. The result is that as we get closer to Christ, we draw closer to each other. That's the secret of Christian marriage.

The Old Testament says this, **[SLIDE...]** **"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken"** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NRSV).

This passage talks about two being better than one then it ends with talking about a cord of three strands being hard to break. What is that third strand? I believe that it's God. God is the third partner who makes the marriage very difficult to break. And I hope that you're experiencing that third strand in your life. When you invite Christ to be a part of your life, when you see marriage as ministry, when you and your spouse pray with and for each other, when you become involved in a church family where you can grow in your faith and serve God. When you do these things, you will discover love that can truly last a lifetime.

If you're not a Christian, or just nominally a Christian, please know that Jesus has so much to offer you in every area of your life, including the areas of love, marriage and sex. If you've not invited God into to your life, maybe this is the time—maybe today's the day. My hope as your pastor is that Jesus Christ would be the foundation of your life and the foundation of your relationships. My hope as your pastor is that you'd receive him and find the life he's got for you and that you'd see the difference his presence can make not only in your marriage and relationships, but in everything. Faith in him changes everything, so if you've not begun that relationship with him, what's stopping you? He has so much he's ready to give you.

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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