

### **Family Matters 3: MARRIAGE MATTERS**

#### **Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 19:3-6 (5/22/16)**

Marriage matters. We're taking a look at various family matters within the home, and marriage is nothing less than foundational. Other aspects of our homes and families are best constructed upon the firm foundation of a solid, Christ-honoring marriage.

But that's easier said than done—right? We usually eat cake at weddings. Pam has been making arrangements for a "grooms cake" for an upcoming wedding in our family—but listen: marriage itself is no "piece of cake!" It isn't easy. Never has been.

To illustrate this, I want us to turn to two passages of Scripture, one from the Old Testament, the other from the New. Both of these speak to marriage—but they do so in very different ways.

We'll begin with a Scripture that we don't hear often—and perhaps, for good reason. Listen to this one verse from **Deuteronomy 24:1 (NIV): If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...**

Okay, let's stop right here. Talk about a hassle-free divorce! This was written back when men were still men! Do you hear what it's saying? Men, if your wife displeases you in some way, just write her a certificate of divorce.

Now, this was a very complicated document. It said, "I divorce you." That's what was on a certificate of divorce; and it was all that was required to send the little lady packing! This was not a "no-fault" divorce, friends, but an "it's all HER fault" divorce.

When we look at family matters as they're addressed in the Bible, we must take into account the culture of the day. If we don't, we'll likely arrive at conclusions that are not what God intends.

This Scripture is a case in point. While this was not God's original intention, by the time of Moses, women, along with their children, any household servants, and all the family belongings were the "property" of the man of the house. And things really hadn't changed much by the time the New Testament was written.

A thousand years later, men still enjoyed debating the meaning of those words found back in Deuteronomy. Just how minute could the problem be for a man to decide his wife was “displeasing” to him or in some way “indecent” so he could “cut her loose” with a clear conscience. The bar had been set very low!

But now there was a new rabbi on the scene. They, of course, wanted to get *him* in on this discussion—and did. We find this in the second passage I want us to look at, **Matthew 19:3-6 (NIV)**:

**<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”**

**<sup>4</sup> “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

They came to Jesus wanting a ruling on the Old Testament law. Instead, Jesus skipped over the Law, taking them all the way back to the beginning. He quotes from the first two chapters of Genesis to talk about God’s original intention for marriage.

In the process, Jesus made it clear that “marriage matters.” In fact, it matters a lot more than they seemed to realize! But Jesus goes on to say in Matthew 19 that marriage isn’t easy, and also that marriage is not for everybody.

*I heard a story about a young man, a newlywed, who came home from work and found his bride crying. “I feel terrible,” she told him. “I was pressing your suit...and I burned a big hole in the seat of your pants.”*

*“Forget about it,” he said...trying to console her. “I’ve got an extra pair of pants for that suit.”*

*“Yes,” she said, “and it’s a good thing, too. I was able to cut a piece out of that other pair to patch the hole.”* In an earlier day, that would have been plenty to earn her a “certificate of divorce!”

Choosing a mate is one of life’s most important decisions—and, of course, most of us make it when we are young...and...in love! What could possibly go wrong?

God designed marriage to be the most fulfilling, exciting, and satisfying human relationship possible. For many couples, it is--thankfully. But for

others, marriage seems to consist of one painful conflict after another--until somebody decides to end it.

Most of the news we get today about marriage is bad news. But marriage is still at the heart of a healthy, well-functioning family; so how can we get our marriages to work better, to function as God intends?

The Pharisees wanted to get Jesus talking about the marriage laws found in Deuteronomy, but trying to understand marriage always takes us back to the book of beginnings—back to Genesis. This is where we discover God's original intention for marriage.

In the beginning, God designed marriage to meet one of our most basic needs--our need for companionship--for a caring, intimate relationship with another human being. It's a remarkable story.

God creates Adam, breathes life into his nostrils, and puts him in a beautiful garden. Then God says, **"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**

Something's wrong with Adam, the one creature who shares in the very nature of God Himself, having been created "in God's image." God sees that Adam is lonely. Just as this loving God Himself has a need for companionship, so does man.

So God says He'll create "a helper" for Adam—someone to bring the chips and dip when the ball game's on and to keep the house nice and tidy. This is what Adam needs. Right, men?

Well, that's not really the idea here. In Psalm 46, the same word used to refer to Adam's companion (helper) is used for God: **"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help (or helper) in trouble."**

Think of a "helper" as one who supplies what is lacking in the other. God creates Eve, then, to do what Adam cannot do by himself. It's not that he's better than the woman, or that she's better than him, but that each of them alone is inadequate.

God, in His wisdom, designed the marriage relationship to be this way. The husband and the wife need each other. They complete each other. And fact of the matter is, humankind can't continue without each other!

Now, after God says it's not good for the man to be alone, we might expect the next verse to say, "So God created Eve."

But it doesn't. Instead, God puts Adam to work on a major project. Adam's told to give names to all the other animals.

Why? Could it be that God is preparing Adam for marriage--that God is awaking Adam to his need for companionship and love? As Adam surveys all the animals, he sees Mr. Giraffe and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. Llama and his hot Llama mama. The point is, everyone has a partner, except Adam. So where is *his* partner?

It's as if God is creating in Adam a desire for a mate, a hunger that would be satisfied only by...Eve. The first part of the story ends with this: **"But for Adam no suitable helper was found."**

So Adam discovers what God has already observed. He's living in a paradise where he has everything he needs, except this other person...who would be so much like him; and yet, different in ways that would delight, and fascinate, and—yes--complete him.

Everything else was only a poor substitute. Even the beauty of the Garden of Eden, the joy of joining with God in taking care of it, and the blessings of God's presence with him there, could not fully meet Adam's desire for companionship. He needs his mate!

So this loving God meets Adam's need. Genesis tells us **"...the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.'" (Gen. 2:21-23)**

God "brought her to the man," it says. In the 34 years I've been a Pastor, it's been my privilege to watch many a proud papa escort his daughter down the church aisle on her wedding day.

Something like this must have happened in Eden as the Almighty God, in the role of "Father of the bride," brings His crowning act of creation, Eve, and presents her to Adam.

God has designed us, friends, for love and companionship. For most of us, this eventually leads to marriage. God first makes Adam aware of his need. Then He creates a partner for Adam and presents her to him. And he...is very pleased!

Scholars of Biblical Hebrew tell us the phrase, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" means something like: "Wow! You really got this right, God. This is who I've been waiting for all my life!" Adam knows immediately that Eve is a "keeper."

If you're married, do you remember that first time you looked at your future spouse and realized 'you are the one I have been waiting for all my life?' Some of us would do well to refresh our memories a bit and rediscover the joyful wonder of that moment.

When doing marriage counseling, I often have the estranged couple tell me how they first met, began dating, and when they fell in love. I get them to tell me about their wedding and honeymoon and their earliest experiences with marriage.

I want them to see that this is not some villain, but the person they once fell in love with! So...what's happened??? For some, there've been so many hurts and disappointments in their relationship, they're not sure they can still remember!

But this is good therapy for any marriage. Remember those times of discovery when you felt so blessed and thankful that this person would choose to spend their life with you. Memories of better days may be the only thing that will get you through those sad and angry times and give you hope for the future.

Even in the best of times, we need to remember the things that strengthen our marriages and protect them from such discord. In the time remaining, I want to share with you three Biblical principles for marriage—and we actually find these in several places in Scripture...because, again..."marriage matters!"

**#1: Marriage is a PRIORITY Relationship.** Genesis tells us that a man will **"leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife."** Jesus quoted these words in our text for today.

Marriage changes our relationship with Mom and Dad. There's a separation that must occur for marriage to succeed. At first, this may sound sad or even heartless--because, for most of us, the closest relationship we have before marriage is with our parents.

But when we marry, the relationship with Mom and Dad takes a backseat to our relationship with our spouse. The parent/child connection doesn't end,

of course; but it becomes secondary to the relationship between husband and wife—and both parents and children need to understand and respect this change in status.

This principle applies to all other relationships. Friends are still important—but our spouse is more important. People at work are important—as is our job and any other interests we have—but our spouse is more important, and our actions must demonstrate this.

We can still be loyal to our parents, friends, and others, as long as our first loyalty is to our spouse. Anything less than this will weaken our marriage and make it more prone to failure.

**#2: Marriage is a PERMEATING Relationship.** Creating some separation between ourselves and others gives us the opportunity to grow closer to our spouse. We leave in order to cleave.

This kind of relationship has to be more than physical, although the physical relationship plays a vital role in this. God's plan for marriage includes sex-- which in the Bible is called "**knowing.**"

When we find that word in Scripture, it's usually followed by the birth of a child—so, it's not talking about "a casual acquaintance."

The sexual relationship between husband and wife is celebrated in Scripture. In Genesis, we read, "**The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.**"

Subtle, but we get the point! Go to the Song of Solomon, though, and the relationship is not so subtle! Read it in mixed company, and it'll make you blush!

Sexual intimacy, nakedness without shame, means knowing the other person and accepting them as they are...when all the coverings are stripped away. Marriage is designed by God to be incredibly intimate—with no way to hide our flaws, or attributes.

At its best, it makes us vulnerable and transparent. It reveals our need to be loved by another person--sometimes because of who we are, but often in spite of who we are—something like the way God loves us, when you think about it.

But while this physical relationship draws us together, marriage is intended to permeate all aspects of who we are: the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional—all growing toward oneness.

I don't know if John Legend knew he was being Biblical when he wrote in that beautiful song, "I give you all of me and you give me all of you," but he was. That's what a permeating relationship is all about!

**"The two shall become one flesh..."** Friends, that's not the result of a beautiful wedding ceremony or the perfect honeymoon. It requires years of sharing every aspect of life together for a husband and wife to begin to experience the "one fleshness" that God intends. Which brings us to this:

**#3: Marriage is a PERMANENT Relationship.** The word "united"—as in "a man...will be UNITED to his wife"-- literally means **"to form a permanent bond."** The word **"CLEAVE"** refers to a union that's so strong, it would take something violent to break it apart.

This is important. Unless a couple is willing to make a commitment to be with each other in good times and bad, and live according to these vows—without such commitment, the gaps in the foundation of that marriage will be too wide for it to stand.

Put another way--unless there's a strong, mutual commitment to make marriage a life-long relationship—it probably won't be!!!

Do something for me. If you're married, try to picture your marriage on a continuum. Every marriage is somewhere between **Separateness and Oneness**. And every marriage is moving--either closer together, or further apart.

We can't just coast along in marriage, at least not for long. The challenges are too many. There's some kind of stress in a relationship almost daily. Time problems, financial challenges, children misbehaving...and moms and dads misbehaving too.

So, right now, is your marriage moving closer together...or further apart? Are you moving toward oneness or toward separateness?

Whatever the condition of your marriage right now—even if you feel like it's heading in all the wrong directions--with God's help, it's not hopeless. It can be better. The two of you can be closer.

Jesus Christ is all about hope. He's all about bringing victory out of defeat. Reconciliation--fixing what's broken—is His specialty.

1) If forgiveness is what's needed, then by all means, forgive one another.

2) If time together is what's missing, then do whatever it takes to find the time to invest in each other.

3) If you don't love your spouse anymore, then confess that sin to God—because it is a sin not to love your spouse. Confess it, ask God to forgive you and help you love again.

4) Make a commitment to God that you will begin right now to follow His plan and build a marriage that's strong, loving, and mutually satisfying—one that will be a joy to yourself and a blessing to everyone who is part of your home and family.