

Three Foundations for a Thriving Marriage

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[0 : 00] Well, in last month's sermon on the topic of marriage, I spoke about the effects of sin on marriage. We talked about how God made marriage good, a special relationship between a man and a woman.

But then we heard about how the fall of man away from God left us bent towards selfishness and lust and pride and hardness of heart.

And how these things very quickly lead to conflict and broken relationships and the spoiling of marriage. These things lead to, we talked about attempts to get the goodness of marriage in some other way.

And those attempts always fail and lead to ruin. But last month I also talked about how the gospel of Jesus Christ is just what we need. It's the remedy to sin. It's the solution to pride.

It's what we need to soften our hard hearts. In Jesus we find freedom from both the penalty of sin and the power of sin.

[1 : 12] We receive the Spirit of God to live in us. And He empowers us to turn back to God's good design for marriage and sexuality. God's Spirit enables us to walk in purity and holiness and true love.

And from there marriage can again, so long as both parties are walking humbly with Jesus, be experienced as the good and joyful gift that God intended. Wounds can heal as we forgive one another, just as Christ forgave us.

And this faith that we have in Jesus, it leads us to a new attitude, a new heart, a new life. A life characterized by forgiveness and humility toward our spouses.

Of course it doesn't mean that conflict will never happen in a marriage of two Christian people. But it means that we have what we need from God to resolve those conflicts when they happen.

And even to love without expecting anything in return. And that makes all the difference. Well this all leads us to our focus for this morning. What are the foundations for a good marriage?

[2 : 34] What are the essentials for a healthy, thriving, and happy marriage in a fallen and broken world? And there's lots of things that we could talk about here.

There's lots of right answers to this question. Good answers to this question. But this morning I'm just going to focus on three. Three foundations for a good, healthy, thriving, happy marriage in a fallen and broken world.

Foundation number one is a passionate and persevering love for God. Having a passionate and persevering love for God makes all the difference in the world in a marriage.

We've already said that marriage is made by God and that it's a gift of God. And since it's a gift from God, marriage is not the most important relationship in life.

Our relationship with the God who gave it to us is the most important relationship in life. We're just about a month away from Christmas. That time of year when many exchange gifts.

[3 : 47] Probably most of us grew up loving Christmas. Especially that moment when we got to unwrap the presents. The excitement of not knowing what our parents had wrapped up for us.

Maybe a new toy under the tree was almost too much to bear. 5 a.m. couldn't come soon enough. But all these years later as adults, do we remember each and every present we received?

From each and every person each year? No. But we remember the love of the people who gave them to us. Which was far greater.

A thoughtful gift that met a deep need. A costly gift. Not because it was expensive. But because the person who gave it had very little at the time.

Or perhaps a handmade gift. Something that couldn't be bought in the store. But you knew that a loved one had spent hours making it just the way it was for you.

[4 : 51] These gifts are tokens of the love of a person. But far greater than the gift is the giver of the gift.

This is how it is with marriage. We have it wrong if, and we're missing it, if we're looking for the great companion of our souls here on earth.

In a relationship. Even in a marriage. Marriage is just a token. It's just a pointer to the great relationship. The ultimate marriage.

That we were all made for. And that's our relationship with God. And so, if I had to give a married person or a person seeking marriage.

One scripture passage in the whole Bible. I would choose this one. Matthew 22. 34 to 40. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees.

[5 : 51] The Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question. Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?

Jesus replied, Love the Lord your God with all your heart. And with all your soul. And with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. This might seem a strange scripture to go to when looking for wisdom about marriage.

But what could make for a better marriage than a strong and vibrant relationship with the God who made marriage? What could make for a better marriage than deeply knowing and loving the God who is love?

The God whose kindness and patience and forgiveness are so powerful and beautiful. And if we love God with all our hearts, totally and passionately, then our earthly relationships find their proper places in our lives.

[7 : 09] We're the best that we can be towards others. Towards the girlfriend, the boyfriend, the fiancée, or the spouse. Nothing makes a good, healthy, thriving, happy marriage in a fallen world more than loving God with all your heart.

And with all your soul. And with all your mind. How does this work? How do we apply this? Well, if you want to have the best marriage you can, whether you are not yet married, dating, engaged, or married for a long time, if you want to have the best marriage you can, make it your life to love the Lord with all your heart.

As deeply as you can. This changes you so deeply and profoundly that we can't even begin to measure the good effect that it will have on your marriage relationship now and into the future. This brings us to a second foundation for a good, healthy, thriving, happy marriage in a fallen world. If you are not yet married, but looking for a lifelong companion, a husband or wife, look for the person who loves God with all their heart.

[8 : 39] Look for the person who loves Jesus even more than you. More than anyone around you. What they look like, what they're interested in, what they do for career or work, all of that is secondary.

Do they love God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their mind? It says this in Proverbs 31, a wife of noble character who can find.

She is worth far more than rubies. Solomon then goes on to list out all the things that she does which show her noble character and then at the end of the list, towards the end of the list, he says this, charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting.

It flies away. But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. That's what to look for in a spouse. a man or woman who fears the Lord. A man or woman of noble character. A man or woman who loves God with all their heart.

[9 : 55] With these things alone, you can save yourself a world of relational heartache and pain. Make it your life to love God passionately with everything you've got.

and only say I do or ask someone to marry you. Someone who has that same heart for the Lord. That same love for the Lord. That same fear of God. This will make all the difference in your life. This makes all the difference in marriage.

It makes all the difference in a family. because God is love. He is life. He's everything. And if we walk continually with Him loving Him with all we've got everything is affected for the best.

And so that's foundation one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart. The first key to a thriving marriage. And foundation two. If you're not yet married say I do only to someone who shares that

love for God.

[11 : 03] And I want to expand on this a little and I know that many of you here are already married and have made that choice. And these words maybe had envisioned a few more people who are unmarried here in the audience today but maybe there's some people you know who you can share this wisdom with who are unmarried or who are thinking about marriage.

It's wise to look for the person who loves God the most but maybe you might wonder what if that person is already taken?

What if there's no one my age around me who loves God like that? Or who shares my faith like that? And there can be this powerful temptation to settle for less.

To go for a person who loves you but who doesn't love Jesus. Never settle for less when it comes to choosing who you will marry.

Listen to these words of wisdom from the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the church in Corinth. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

[12 : 13] For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?

Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

As God has said I will live with them and walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate says the Lord.

Now Paul's main application here is not marriage. This is actually about compromise. It's about welcoming into the church as brothers and sisters those who worship idols and false gods.

And Paul's saying don't do that. Don't be joined together with unbelieving idol worshiping people. Come out from them and be separate from them.

[13 : 21] You belong to God now. You belong to Christ. You can't have a true union and a deep fellowship with those who don't share in that faith in Christ.

It's like trying to mix light and darkness together. It's like trying to say that Christ Jesus our king can live in harmony with Belial.

That's another name for the devil. Paul's main application here is not marriage but the principle that he gives fits perfectly with marriage. If you shouldn't invite unbelievers who have a different religion to join the church as members and to be part of the church family then you shouldn't invite an unbeliever who has a different religion than you to be part of your family and to join with you in marriage.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers says the Lord. And that word yoked it comes from the way they used to do things back in ancient times.

They used oxen or donkeys to plow and to pull carts and other things and the yoke is that harness that goes between the two animals and keeps them together so that they can pull or work in unison.

[14 : 49] And the term that Paul uses here is actually difficult to translate into English. It means to yoke together two different species of animal like a donkey and an ox at the same time.

One translation says do not be mismatched with unbelievers or do not be unevenly yoked or unequally yoked. What do you think would happen if you try to drive a wagon pulled by an ox and a donkey?

It's going to be nothing but frustration or chaos. They're two different animals.

They have different sizes. They have different strides. They have different temperaments. The ox is stronger. If he pulls harder than the donkey well the wagon is going to go to one side.

And donkeys are known to be stubborn and they might just drag their feet. You're not going to get where you want to go. It just won't work. That's the picture that Paul is trying to give us here.

[15 : 57] That's what happens when believers join themselves to unbelievers. And this has played itself out time and time again in dating relationships and marriages. If you don't have the same faith in Jesus, the same heart for Jesus, the same love for God, it's going to be a frustrating or chaotic disaster.

There's going to be a lot of conflict. If you're a believer and they're not, how's this going to work?

One of you will be pulling one way towards God and the other will be pulling the other way away from God.

And it affects every aspect of a marriage and life, whether or not you do family devotions together and pray together, whether or not you all go to church.

The kids will grow up getting mixed messages from mom and dad. One of them says, this is really important, you need to do this, we need to believe in Jesus, and the other says, yeah, kind of, but not really.

It affects the priorities of the marriage and the family, how you spend your time as a family, your finances, and the list goes on. A boyfriend or girlfriend might say, they don't care what you believe, they'll go along with you.

[17 : 19] You can have faith and live for God however you want, I'll just go along with you. But if Christ doesn't live in their heart, then it's like trying to have fellowship, light having fellowship with darkness.

That's what Paul says, it's like two different types of animals pulling in opposite directions, it won't work. many marriages blow apart because of this.

Sometimes the unbelieving spouse will go along with the believing spouse for a while. Sometimes the believer will give up the fight and compromise even more, which has a devastating effect on the soul, and on the marriage, and on the children.

And so if you're not yet married, do not be yoked together. with an unbeliever. Paul gives no middle ground here.

He says you're either a believer or you're not. You're an unbeliever. You're either a follower of Christ or a follower of the devil, Belial. There's only two camps. The devil is the default, though the world doesn't realize it.

[18 : 33] There's no middle ground. Do not be yoked. Do not be joined or mated or mismatched with an unbeliever in dating or in marriage. It's far better to stay single than to be stuck together with someone whose heart cannot be one with yours in Christ.

So these are two things, two foundations for a good, solid, thriving, happy marriage in a fallen world. Love God with all your heart, heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and only say I do to someone who loves God like that too.

And then the last one for today, a third foundation. Marriage was designed by God to be a permanent covenant union. A permanent covenant union.

union. Why do a man and woman exchange vows at a wedding? Probably many people today think it's just tradition. Something that you say to show the other person that you're serious and that you really mean it and that this is a special relationship that you hope will last.

Sadly, many engaged couples give little thought to their marriage vows. many of them just show up at the wedding and they're so focused on the dress and the decorations and the flowers, everything that's going on.

[20 : 05] And then they have that moment at the front with the officiating pastor where they repeat after him, hopefully I don't mess up my words. And a year later, do they even remember what they promised?

What they vowed to the other person? We love those words for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health.

But then how many even stop to think seriously over what they mean? You are promising love and loyalty no matter the circumstance and no matter the outcome.

If men and women really understood their vows and took them seriously, would we even consider divorce as an option? Wouldn't we seek every help from God and man to work through the conflict and fix what's become broken in a marriage?

I think our culture is losing this understanding of marriage as a permanent covenant union. what does permanent mean?

[21 : 15] What does till death do us part mean? This is the kind of relationship marriage was made to be. And the covenant nature of it isn't just tradition, it comes from the Bible.

It comes from God. There's lots of passages that talk about it, or I should say several, where we could see it, but we're just going to look at one quickly this morning.

From the last Old Testament prophet, the book of Malachi. Malachi chapter 2 verse 10, I'll read it and then we'll pull a couple things out of it.

This is Malachi speaking. He says to the people of Israel, do we not all have one father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?

Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign God. [22 : 29] As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord remove him from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty. Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears.

You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. Godly, you ask, why?

It is because the Lord is witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring.

So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect, says the Lord Almighty.

[23 : 43] So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. Now this is a difficult place in the Bible to just jump in and start reading.

You might be wondering what's going on here, what God is talking about. There's been this long history of relationship between God and the people of Israel. God has shown unbelievable patience and kindness and mercy towards them.

And yet the people of Israel on the whole are continuing to turn away from God. I'm not going to go over the whole story and all the details. But God sends this man, Malachi, to be his spokesperson to the people and to bring his message to them.

And the overall message of God to them is, you have been unfaithful to me. Repent and turn back to me. Return to me. And so here in chapter 2, God is speaking through Malachi and he's kind of telling them the hard truth.

They have profaned the covenant that their ancestors made with God by doing a number of wicked things. And then he starts naming them and listing them. The descendants of Judah, he says, have married women who worship foreign gods.

[25 : 00] And then they try to appease the Lord by offering sacrifices to him at the temple and almost like we haven't done anything wrong or if we have you could just forgive us, right? Malachi tells them in verse 13 that God no longer looks with favor on their offerings or accepts them.

And the reason is given in verse 14. You ask why? It is because the Lord is witness between you and the wife of your youth.

You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. And so what the men of Judah have done, they were already married.

They had wives of their youth, which wives from among their own people, and then they were unfaithful to those wives. They went and married other women from the pagan, idol-worshipping peoples around them.

And there's really two massive problems with this. The first problem is what we were just talking about. The problem of becoming unequally yoked together with someone who doesn't have the same faith as you.

[26 : 16] This is a massive problem. And if we go back in the story of Israel, we see that this has been a problem for centuries. Solomon himself is the most prominent example of it.

Let me just read you a snippet from his story in 1 Kings chapter 11. King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites.

They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, you must not intermarry with them because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods. Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.

He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been.

He followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[27 : 33] He did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. It goes on from there to describe the consequences of Solomon's actions.

As punishment for this sin, God took the kingdom away from Solomon, except one or two tribes that was taken from his son. This sin of marrying all these wives who worshipped other gods is what led to the ruin of Solomon's great kingdom.

It's what eventually led Israel to be punished by God later and go into exile. Now they've just come back into the land from exile not too long ago, and they're doing it again in the days of Malachi. Malachi. They're marrying women who worship other gods. And if even the great wise King Solomon was not able to keep his heart devoted to the Lord, but compromised, so will these men in Malachi's day.

Again, we see this clear principle from God that we're not to be joined in marriage to those who don't share our faith in God. But that's just one of the problems. The second problem Malachi brings up is that these women who worship foreign gods are not their first wives.

[28 : 51] In order to get with these pagan women, what did they do? Glance down to verse 16. They divorced their first wives.

These men, each of them, did not keep the marriage covenant they had made with the wife of their youth. They divorced their first wives so that they could marry these women who worship foreign gods.

What God emphasizes here more than anything else is the unfaithfulness of this and the betrayal of this. You have been unfaithful to her though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. God saying, you made a covenant with her. You made solemn vows to her. She became your partner, your wife and you've betrayed her.

You've broken your vows to her. You've been unfaithful. We look down to verse 16. God basically says, by divorcing her, you have hated the one that you pledged to love.

[30 : 02] By sending her away, you have done violence to the one that you should protect. The marriage relationship is a covenant relationship.

We see that so clearly here. It's a relationship built on vows that are sworn to one another and witnessed by God. And this is what makes the relationship special.

This is what makes the relationship permanent. It's the vows. It's that covenant between man and woman. I think in our culture today, though, we've lost the meaning of covenant.

Promises are made and broken all the time. Agreements are signed and agreements are broken all the time. We barely have an idea of what covenant is anymore.

One of the ways that we can get back to the meaning of covenant is to go into the Bible and we can read the story of how God made a covenant with Abraham. We're not going to do that this morning.

[31 : 09] You can do that and see it in Genesis 15. But basically, what they did in those days to make a covenant, they chopped a bunch of animals in half. And then they took the halves and separated them.

They made their vows to each other. This is what I'm going to do. This is what I'm going to do. And then together, the two parties walked through the animal halves. And the symbolism of that was basically, if I fail to do that, to keep my promise to you, my vow to you, then may God do to me what we just did to these animals.

That was the seriousness of covenant in the ancient times. It was the most serious form of agreement or promise you could make.

You're basically binding yourselves to fulfill your promise by a curse. May God cut me in pieces if I fail to do what I have promised. And so obviously, you were very careful about what you promised when you entered into an arrangement like that.

And you made every effort to do what you promised, no matter how things went. Now, of course, they didn't do this particular ancient ritual at weddings.

[32 : 22] But weddings also involved the making of a covenant between a man and a woman. And that's why we have those wonderful words that we have in weddings today. I take you to be my wife or husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, forsaking all others till death do us part.

These are the words of covenant. The most serious of vows that we can make to another person. That's what God was upset with the Israelites about in the days of Malachi.

It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. In other words, you made binding vows to love and to be loyal to your first wife. And then you broke them when you divorced them so that you could marry another. And so this is foundation number three for a strong, healthy, thriving and happy marriage in a fallen world. We need to know that marriage was made to be permanent. We need to know that it's a covenant relationship.

[33 : 52] It's about persevering in faithfulness, no matter the troubles or trials, no matter the circumstances that face us. Marriage, of course, is about love, but not the flimsy come and go feeling of love.

In the words of a favorite song of mine, marriage is about a love that's a loyalty sworn, not a burning for a moment. Marriage is built on the promise that God makes to his people.

Come what may, I won't abandon you. I will never leave you or forsake you. So practically, what does that mean?

It means that for those who are unmarried, dating is looking for the person who you will make that covenant with. Engagement is the process of preparing to make that covenant with the person that you've pledged yourself to.

And for those of us who are already married, it means that there should be no romantic thought or attention given to others of the opposite sex. We have made our covenant.

[35 : 05] We have made our choice. We have sworn our love and loyalty to one. And deliberately going back on that is unfaithfulness. Very practically speaking, for those of you who are married, there are certain things that you can do, or I should say avoid doing, which will help in your marriage.

No matter how tough things get or how deep the conflict, never threaten to divorce your spouse. Don't even mention or suggest it as an option.

Though the feelings may run hot, though anger burns, or the heart aches, though the tears flow, let your spouse be sure of one thing.

That you meant what you said when you stood at the altar on your wedding day, and that you will not leave them or forsake them. There are certain things that when they are done or said, deeply hurt a spouse.

And if we believe in marriage as a permanent covenant union, then we should never do these things. Ever. And if we've done them, we need to apologize to our spouses and let them know that by the grace of God, we'll never do them again.

[36 : 27] Never express to your spouse that you regret marrying them, or that you wish you could go back and choose differently. Never do anything that symbolizes your going back on your vows or your marriage, your word.

Friends of mine years ago got into a fight on their honeymoon, during which they yelled at each other, swore at each other, then took off their wedding rings and threw them at each other.

I was amazed that their marriage lasted past that fight. Never do anything that symbolizes your going back on your word.

Never even consider getting with another man or woman while you're married. Don't even allow yourself to entertain the thought for a moment of what it would be like to be married to someone else.

There is no one else if you are married. When you have marital conflict, it's sometimes needed to have some space and time from each other, time to pray and time to think, time to cool off.

[37 : 34] If you leave the room from a fight, let your spouse know that you'd need time and space, but that you'll be back. In Ephesians 4.26, it says, Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

If you leave the house after an argument or fight, always come back before tomorrow. The devil would love to ruin your marriage. Don't give him the opportunity.

Think of what that communicates to a person when you leave the fight with no explanation, slam the door, get in the car and drive away. Think of what it communicates if a spouse begins packing their bags in the middle of an argument.

God is witness between you and your spouse, and he desires faithfulness from each of you to the other, to the marriage covenant that you have made. So three foundations for a strong, healthy

marriage.

love God with all your heart. Only say, I do, to those who love God with all their heart. Do not be yoked with unbelievers, and stay faithful to the marriage covenant that you have made.

[38 : 54] Let's pray and ask the Lord for his grace in living us out. Father in heaven, we thank you for your wisdom that comes from your word.

And we think of each marriage that's represented in this room. And we ask for your power to love our spouses the way that you have loved us. Help us to keep our vows and to be faithful to one another.

Lord, we also want to pray for those who are not yet married in this room. And we ask that you would raise their vision of marriage to something that resembles what you intended.

That they would desire to be married in this kind of marriage that you have revealed, and not the kind that our world puts forward. We ask that you would give self-control and wisdom to our young people and our children as they begin to make those decisions.

And as people come into their lives. Lord, we think of those whose marriages are in a really difficult spot right now. And we pray for every grace for them and for their spouses.

[40 : 11] And we ask that you would bring reconciliation and restoration. And we think of those whose marriages have come to an end.

And we're reminded that our ultimate relationship for which we were made is the one with you. And we thank you for that. We just commit ourselves to your grace.

In Jesus' name. Amen.