

Marriage Matters

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Date: 26 May 2024

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at fccgreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page and we appreciate that.

But hey, our heart is simply to get into the Word of God, but most importantly, let this Word get into us so that it can change these hearts more and more into the image of Jesus.

Now, just a quick reminder today that we are going to be talking about a sensitive topic. We're going to be talking about marriage and sexual intimacy. So if you have children, younger children especially, present, it's going to be your call to whether you want them to continue to listen.

Of course, I'm going to be respectful. I'm going to be appropriate in what I talk about. But we are going to get real and talk about sexual intimacy the way that God's Word talks about it because, listen, the world is always teaching in the wrong direction and we must counteract that truth from God's Word.

So obviously that starts at home, but we also as a church, when we come together, we're always going to talk about this topic as well. So let me start off by telling a fictional story about a man walking along a California beach.

[1 : 19] He was deep in prayer when suddenly the sky clouded over and got dark. Then in a booming voice, the Lord says, Because you have faithfully walked with me all these years, I will grant you one wish.

The guy thought hard for a minute and said, Okay, I want you to build a bridge from California to Hawaii so I can drive over anytime I want. It's always been a dream of mine.

I'm just deathly afraid to fly. Well, that's when the Lord responded back and said, I'm God. I can do this for sure, but I'm a little disappointed that you didn't choose something more meaningful.

Just think of the enormous challenges for that kind of project. The supports that go to the bottom of the Pacific. The amount of concrete and steel a job like that would take. The gas stations, hotels, cities, and other resources along that route that would be necessary.

Even the maintenance crews that would be needed, that would be a massive undertaking. I can do it. But is there another request, maybe a little more meaningful, that you'd rather choose?

[2 : 22] So the man thought again and he said, Okay, all right, I got one. I wish I could fully understand women. I want to know how my wife feels inside.

What's she thinking when she gives me the silent treatment? Why does she get so upset about the silly things I do when I'm just joking? What does she really mean when she says that nothing's wrong, but I know something really is?

Basically, how can I make this woman feel happy? And that's when the Lord says, So tell me, did you want two or four lanes on that bridge to Hawaii?

See, that's one of my go-to jokes for weddings that honestly proves a great point. Men and women are wired very differently. Probably the understatement of the year.

And yet when done God's way, marriage is a beautiful bond. There's no other human relationship that is more impactful on society, but more impactful and intimate to a couple.

[3 : 22] And the family unit is vital to changing this world for Christ. More to come on that. But hey, welcome back to our series over the Ten Commandments. Go ahead and turn to Exodus chapter 20.

If you'd like to follow along, it's the second book of the Bible, Exodus 20. But today we come to a pretty straightforward commandment with number seven. And honestly, this one in some ways is like last week when we taught on no murder.

We know it's wrong. We know we shouldn't. But maybe we don't realize all that this simple command entails. Because once again, Jesus adds to it as he's calling us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And then from that love for God flows a love for our neighbor. So let's read Exodus 20 verse 14. And this is what commandment number seven says. You shall not commit adultery.

So if you're a note taker, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app. Y-O-U version Bible app. It's absolutely free. You can download that.

[4 : 31] And you can go to events. Go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. And then you can see our outline that way. But here's the question that I want us to tackle for today.

Why is adultery against the heart of God? And I think we have to start at the beginning here. And here's the first thing I want you to see. Because marriage matters to God.

All throughout Scripture, we see a consistent picture of how God designed marriage. And very early on in the Word, in Genesis chapter 2, we see that God has just brought all the animals before Adam for him to name them.

But in that process, we learn that there was no suitable helper for Adam. Here's what Genesis 2, starting in verse 21, says. So the Lord caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.

And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib that he had taken out of the man.

[5 : 29] 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. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife.

And listen to this. They become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked and felt no shame. I think that's such a cool sentence there. That in true godly marriage, there is an intimacy where there is a freedom together.

So, see, this is the blueprint for marriage that we see supported all throughout God's word. And I really like how Alistair Begg defines the bigger picture.

Kind of lays out the way the Bible defines marriage. The godly parameters for marriage. And he puts it like this. He says, Now, I like that quote because anything outside of these parameters that God designed is dangerous and not pleasing to him.

There's an analogy that compares intimacy and marriage to fire. When fire is in the fireplace or when it's contained, when it's under control, man, it can be used for so much good.

[7 : 13] I mean, it can be life-saving for light, for heat, for food, and so much more. But if you take that fire and say you put it in the middle of your living room floor, it's going to burn your house down.

And as we've seen out west, when that fire gets outside of its proper boundaries and it gets going, it can spread and cause massive devastation. The same thing is true of sex.

It's a wonderful gift designed by God for intimacy, even for children, to even honor the Lord. But if it's used outside of these biblical parameters that God gives us that are intended to keep us safe, to honor him as we walk in his will, if it's outside of that, then it can become dangerous and cause tremendous destruction.

Guys, I'm talking about marriages destroyed, people wounded and broken, children scarred for life, even things like STDs, all of these things that are so familiar now in our culture because we do things outside of God's parameters.

You look at our world around us and then you compare it to God's design of one man, one woman staying sexually pure until they enter marriage where God is invited into that union and then they love and respect one another for a lifetime with the man loving his wife like Jesus loved the church and then the wife submitting to that kind of leadership.

[8 : 41] What a beautiful picture that is. And yet if you're like me, there could easily be some shame because we've not always followed God's design for intimacy like we should.

I know I haven't. We've probably all failed at this in one way or another. And while it's not okay, I don't want to make light of it because there are often major consequences that follow, but I'm also so very thankful for the grace of God that forgives us when we are sincere in our repentance, that washes us clean by the blood of Christ on the cross, and then he sets us on the solid rock to pursue holiness as we shine God's love into this world.

And yet you might be sitting here today thinking, give me a break, Pastor. I mean, this is so old-fashioned, not even possible. Dude, it's 2024. What are you talking about?

And yet we're told in Scripture that our God is unchanging. And through the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can walk in God's will for your dating relationship or how you love your spouse if you're married, even how you care for and you disciple your kids in God's word.

Yeah, you're going to be weird in the world's eyes, but who cares? Because when you do it the world's ways, here's what you get. You get the world's results.

[10 : 07] But I want God's best for me. I want the fruits of the Spirit, and that's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So let me share some statistics with you that prove that God knows what he's doing in designing the family. And listen, these don't come from a Christian source. This is from the University of South Carolina, a study that they did.

They say that those who abstain from sex before marriage report the highest levels of sexual satisfaction in marriage and the highest levels of faithfulness to their spouse. On the other end, they report that those who live together before marriage have higher divorce rates and are more likely to commit adultery in marriage.

See, here's how Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 puts this. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

So what does that look like? It means don't lean on your hormones or your impatience or your revenge or the world's ways that have been taught like they're the only way.

[11 : 15] Those things don't have to control you. The Holy Spirit can control you. So trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. Why? Because in all your ways, submit to him.

That's what we're called to do. And he will make your path straight. See, marriage matters to God. He designed it. He created sex within marriage. And it's a beautiful thing when it's done his way.

If I took a wild guess at how many weddings that I've performed over the years I've been in ministry, I would guess somewhere between 75 and 100 at this point. And I'd love to tell you that every single one of them is going strong to this day, but that would be a complete lie.

But I also can tell you overwhelmingly that those who chose to do the relationship God's way are doing fine. Now listen, you're going to have to grow and you're going to have to learn in marriage. It's not easy and it takes a lot of work, but that's all of us.

But for those who chose to do it outside of God's design, even though we talked about it, those are the ones that are rougher. Those are some of the ones that have ended very badly. And then there's the reality that sometimes one person in the relationship can make such bad decisions that they can really hurt things in a major way.

[12 : 30] And that's hard to see. And we pray for a change of heart there. But I can tell you that God blesses marriage done his way when you enter that marriage already seeking his heart together.

And then you make him the center of everything. And guys, it will create an amazing intimacy and bond that no other earthly relationship can bring.

And it will create an amazing intimacy there. Why? Because that's how God designed it. And I know this may be a little bit of an awkward topic, but he gives us a powerful way to express our love to one another in marriage.

It can even produce the most special gift of children. And he tells us in Hebrews 13, 4, marriage should be honored by all. And the marriage bed kept pure.

For God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. We're even taught to put one another before ourselves in this area. 1 Corinthians 7, starting in verse 3.

[13 : 34] And I want to read this from the New Living Translation. Normally I read from the NIV. But here's what it says. The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs. And the wife should fulfill her husband's needs.

The wife gives authority over her body to her husband. And the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do you see so far this amazing just surrendering one's own self to their spouse?

What a beautiful picture that is. Look at verse 5. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so that you can give yourself more completely to prayer.

And I'll tell you, if this made you blush, that is mild compared to Proverbs 5, 15 through 20 or the whole Song of Solomon which show how God designed sex within marriage and why that is so important to him.

But on a serious note, sex by a man and a woman within the bonds of marriage is sacred to God. And because of that, God says no to adultery.

[14 : 45] Because as too many people, probably listening to my voice, know it can devastate a family and it can send ripple effects that are far-reaching. But here's the good news.

I didn't come here to make you feel bad if you failed in this area because we've all probably fallen short here. But God's grace is amazing when we repent. And we can choose today to do that and we can choose to do our relationship or our marriages God's way going forward.

So why is adultery against God's heart? Because first, marriage matters to God. And then second, purity matters to him. Excuse me, a little froggy today.

And listen, this is one area where the American church has gotten lax, okay? We can't dress like the world. We can't flirt like the world.

We can't watch and look at what the world watches and looks at. Because listen, we are royalty according to God's word. We're children of the king and our greatest desire must be to honor him.

[15 : 50] You know, the very word Christian means to be Christ-like. And if that's the label that we wear, let's run after Jesus with everything we are. Let's keep in step with the Holy Spirit as we may live in this world, but we're called to look different than the world.

And here Jesus goes again, taking another one of the Ten Commandments and adding more to it so that our hearts and our motives are all about pleasing God.

Turn real quick with me here to Matthew 5. Matthew 5, verse 27. This is about three quarters the way through your Bible. First book of the New Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount is the larger context that Jesus is preaching here. And here's what he says. Matthew 5, starting verse 27. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. I think there are very few people who wake up and say, huh, I think I'll just have an affair today and hurt the people I love the most.

[16 : 58] Uh-uh. It starts with the little things. I think I'll take a second look at that pretty girl or that hunky guy and that snowball effect starts in, right? Instead of talking to my husband about our struggles in marriage, I clam up and I'll open up to that kind man at work because he actually knows how to listen to me.

And even though it starts innocently enough, the emotional affair begins and it can take you places you never thought you would go. Instead of maybe guarding my eyes, I'm just gonna watch those videos and look at those pictures that caused me to lust in my heart thinking that it's really not that big of a deal.

I'll put myself in places where temptation is ready to pounce. And if you think this is only a struggle for those who are younger, think again. Satan is always looking to take us down.

I've seen examples of unfaithfulness in marriage in couples that are senior citizens. And this is one area where he will try to use even when we may not be a quote unquote spring chicken anymore, okay?

Because we all have that desire for intimacy. Ephesians 5 verse 3 puts it like this. But among you, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality.

[18 : 17] Let me say it again. There must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, God's word says, or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people.

So let's talk about some safeguards for purity, whether you're single or you're married. And I have five things that I want to share with you and I'm going to have to go through these pretty quickly. But first, and it's got to start here, pursue the heart of God.

This begins with each one of us making the decision that I don't want to just play church. I don't want to just go through the motions. I don't want to just quote unquote be religious or a good person.

I want to know Jesus deeply. That's what Christianity is all about, having a relationship with the God of the universe. I want to honor the one who has set me free from my sin, whose blood covers my sins.

I want to say these words from Psalm 19, 14. May the words of my mouth and may this meditation of my heart, Lord, be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

[19 : 20] So first, pursue the heart of God. Second, memorize the word. What does Psalm 119, 13 say? It says, I have hidden your word in my heart. Why? So that I might not sin against you.

Jesus shows us an amazing example of this when Satan comes to tempt him three times. And what's he do? He quotes the word of God. He calls the word of God up as his strength.

And this is especially true with sexual temptation. There's not a one of us who can't fall into temptation in one way or another. Okay, so we get into the Bible.

We keep that word fresh in our minds for when temptation comes our way. We can call it back up. We can honor God. And if you're married, show love to your spouse and your family by how you let the word of God fill your mind.

And then third, find your tribe. Find your tribe. Hebrews 10, 24 and 25 shows how important it is to surround yourself with a godly community.

[20 : 21] People who are imperfect, so they got problems just like you and I do, but we can come together and help each other pursue the heart of God. Here's what that Hebrews 10 passage says.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Yes, worshiping together as the church is important, but it's also vital that you find your smaller tribe and you love each other well. Get into the word together.

Be that support system for one another. Hold each other accountable. Celebrate life together. Carry each other's burdens when life gets hard. It will make such a difference in your life.

Find your tribe. And then fourth, set godly boundaries. It is so important that we have a game plan for when temptation comes. Let me share a few things Bethany and I have put in place since the beginning of our marriage and our ministry.

[21 : 28] We know that Satan takes great delight in destroying churches by causing leaders to have moral failures. This church in the past and many others know that heartache all too well.

And it takes years to rebuild trust, to build the church back up, to be an impact in the community again. And so from day one, Bethany and I, when we went into ministry, we're on the same page.

When I meet with the opposite sex, we do a lot of counseling and meeting with people. When I do that, I keep the door open. I make sure that others are around. And I've had to have awkward conversations where a woman will come in my office and close the door because of privacy and I will ask them to open it back up.

Listen, they meant nothing by it. It was completely innocent. But remember that scripture from Ephesians 5 there, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality. We don't even make it appear like there could be sexual immorality.

We also don't ride, one thing Bethany and I decided, we don't ride in the same vehicle alone with the opposite sex unless it's family. So put boundaries, there could be so many more than that, but put boundaries in place to protect yourself.

[22 : 40] Be ready when Satan tries to bring things along your way. And then fifth, flee temptation. 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 18.

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside of the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you've received from God?

You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. Let me give you the race, sweet, redneck translation of that, okay? Here it goes.

Run, Forrest, run! There's a reason that you're told to flee, to get out of there instead of stand up to it. Sexual temptation is so much stronger than so many other sins that come at you.

So run, get yourself out of there. And we have a good example of this towards the end of Genesis. Where Joseph, not Mary and Joseph, but Joseph in the Old Testament, has had these dreams of standing tall among his brothers.

[23 : 47] And they didn't like the sound of their younger brother ruling over them. So they roughed him up and they sold him into captivity. They lied to their father saying he had been killed. And he found himself a slave to a powerful official who worked under Pharaoh, the Pharaoh of Egypt.

His name was Potiphar, a powerful man. And because of Joseph's godly work ethic and integrity and God's blessings over him, he rose quickly through the ranks until he oversaw the entire household.

And one day, Potiphar's wife, and you know, I'm just speculating here, but this is this rich and powerful man. She's probably an attractive woman. That's, I don't know that, but I'm just guessing.

But Potiphar's wife sees what the Bible calls a good-looking and well-built young man, and she decides she wants him. And I have a feeling she was rarely told no with her wealth and social status.

So she comes on to Joseph. And it would have been so easy after life had been brutal to him to give in to this pleasure, to wrong someone else when he had been wronged over and over, but he wouldn't do it.

[24 : 52] He said, I can't go against my master Potiphar. But listen to this. More importantly to him was this. I can't sin against my God. This goes against his heart. And he ran away from her.

Of course she lied and said that he came on to her and that he was trying to make advances, and he was thrown into prison. Listen, right where he needed to be so God could eventually elevate him to the number two man all over all of Egypt to save his family.

If you get a chance, go to the later part of the book of Genesis and read that. But when sexual temptation comes, and here's what I want you to see. When sexual temptation stares you in the eyes, follow Joseph's example.

Get yourself out of there. Run, and God will bless it. So let me give this challenge to the church who is set apart and called to be different from the world.

For those single among us, don't lower your godly standards. Make sure when you enter a relationship that they love Jesus as much as you do. And then pursue him together.

[25 : 56] Keep your purity together, and I will promise you God will bless that. For those of you in a dating relationship, do it God's way. You'll never regret it.

It's not too late to make changes to honor him. If you've already fallen short in this area, you can make that covenant today that you're going to do this God's way. And then for those of us who are married, love your spouse with everything you are.

Guard your heart. Guard your eyes. Guard your mind. And enjoy that spouse that God has given you. Because marriage and purity matter to the Lord.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just this incredible word of God that you have given us to help us to grow in you every day.

And God, I know that today was kind of a sensitive topic that maybe could be a little awkward to talk about, could make some people blush, and yet this matters to you because marriage matters to you.

[27 : 05] Purity matters to you. So Father, I just pray that the church will stop looking like the world, that we will stop running after lust like the world does, and we will settle for nothing less than your best.

And that is doing relationships or marriage in your way. So God, teach us what it looks like to truly love and honor you in how we deal with our hearts when it comes to relationships.

So Father, we just give this to you. And you know that we've all probably fallen short in this area in one way or another, whether we've given in to sexual temptation or whether we don't love our spouse the way you call us to, or whether we don't guard our heart and our minds, whatever it may be.

We just give this to you. And we ask that you will help us to walk in victory in Christ, to overcome that temptation, and to be a child of God who walks in your amazing freedom.

So Lord, we surrender this area to you and we pray in your precious name, Jesus. Amen. Hey, I want to give you this quick invitation today.

[28 : 19] If you're listening and you do not have a relationship with Christ, you've never surrendered your heart to him, I would love to come alongside you on this journey, just like people have done for me.

So here's a couple ways that you can reach out to us. Maybe just have some faith questions. That's okay. We'd love to come alongside you here. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.

But you can go ahead and call the church office 812-663-8488. 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, thank you so much for joining us today. I pray that you have a great week.