

Family

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[0 : 00] Good morning all. As Jimmy said, Nick said, we're in Proverbs at the moment, a series on wisdom. Last week, Jimmy preached on the evil of envy, and he talked about, at the start of it, his engagement two weeks earlier.

I wondered how long it would take to get it into a sermon, and two weeks must be some sort of new record, I would think. He's obviously pretty excited about it. And so today we're going to talk about marriage.

And your laughter at that point tells me that it is, as the Bible says, a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. This is a great mystery. It is a great mystery.

Nat and I have been married for nearly 18 years, and she had no idea what she was getting into at the time. And over the course of those 18 years, she's been married to three different men, all of them me.

It is, in fact, a great mystery. Proverbs is about living wisely in the world, and this area of family relationships is an area where the vast majority of us need wisdom.

[1 : 14] It's an area where wrong choices and habitually bad behaviours can be devastating. And so this message is taking a very general look at some pretty basic principles of family life and relationships according to Proverbs.

Even though at every point of what I'm saying isn't relevant for everyone right now. I'm going to be straying across a whole different areas, but something will be.

And collectively, we will represent a whole range of family statuses. Some married, for instance, here and some are not. Some have children, some don't have children. Some with grandchildren, some with children who are still at home but should have left some time ago.

Some who won't get to experience that for many years to come. Some with parents who are alive, some who are parents who are not alive, and the list goes on and on and on. There is something ultimately for everyone.

So try not to tune out the point that it's not your status right now. The theme of wisdom runs right through all the relationships are pretty much universal.

[2 : 21] That's pretty helpful because there isn't just differences now in a particular relationship status, but there's also quite differences in terms of our heritage and our backgrounds and our cultures and the way we view family.

Like in family, in Western societies is primarily driven by individualistic thinking. In Eastern societies, traditional society, it's very much more corporate orientated in their views of family. So there's a collective wisdom here which cuts across for everything. So let's kick off with a relationship between a husband and a wife. In the Bible, there are three human institutions that are set apart from all others.

The family, the church, and the state. There's nothing in the Bible about how schools should be run, for instance. Although they are crucial to a flourishing society, there's nothing about corporations and museums and hospitals.

In fact, there are all sorts of great institutions and human enterprises that the Bible doesn't address directly or regulate. That means that we are therefore free to invent them in line with the general principles of human life that the Bible gives us.

[3 : 32] But marriage is different. It is very different. As it says in the preface of our church's wedding service, marriage is instituted by God.

It is a gift from God for human well-being. And so what that means is, contrary to some popular opinions at the moment, marriage didn't evolve in the Bronze Age or the ages past as a way to determine property rights.

At the climax of the creation account at the beginning of the Bible, we see God bringing a man and a woman together and he unites them in marriage. The Bible begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve and at the end with the wedding of Christ and his church in the book of Revelation.

Marriage is God's idea. And it's the way that he describes his relationship with his people. Now, it is certainly also a human institution and it reflects the character of the particular human culture in which it is embedded.

But the concept and the roots of human marriage are in God's own action. And therefore, what the Bible says about God's design for marriage is crucial.

[4 : 49] What that means is that what God institutes, he regulates. If God invented marriage, then those who enter in it should make every effort to understand and submit to his purpose for it.

In the same way that we don't ignore the manufacturer's instructions in how to use and maintain a car that we've just bought. If you've just bought a Corolla, you don't treat it like it's a 400 horsepower John Deere tractor.

It will break. Now, many in society, I acknowledge it's a hot topic right now, would disagree with some of my basic starting point here.

But it's my starting point. It's the starting point of historical Christianity. And so I don't expect that everyone, potentially not even everyone here today, to have the same starting point that I have.

But I do hope that you're able to see how penetrating and how practical the Bible is on this issue of marriage. Proverbs tells us, first of all, that marriage is a covenantal relationship.

[6 : 00] For instance, chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, we read, A marriage is a covenant, which means it's a binding agreement.

Now, I can't tell you the number of the times I've had people say to me, because I've got a license to marry people, the number of times I've had people say to me, or I've read something like this, why do I need a piece of paper to tell someone that I love them?

And the answer, of course, is, well, you don't. Of course you don't do that. Tell them you love them. That's fine. But a wedding service and a marriage certificate is not a declaration of promise of present love.

That's not what it is. It's a promise of future commitment and love. You can go to virtually any marriage service, whether it's in the churches or not, and they will say either nothing or very little about the way you feel right now.

They're all about behaviour. The vows are promises to be tender, to be considerate, to be faithful, to be loving in the future through all the ups and downs and ins and outs of life and relationship.

[7 : 35] Marriage is a covenant, not just a declaration of my present love, but a promise, a commitment to future love and commitment.

Now, marriage is also, therefore, based on a ministry mindset. You might have noticed it already. I suspect you did notice. As Proverbs 5 was read out, chapter 5, verse 18 to 20, May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth, a loving doe, a graceful deer.

May her breast satisfy you always. Will you ever be intoxicated with her love? Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

Now, what that's, at the very least, Proverbs 5 is saying, is that your spouse should be your lover. Your marriage should, therefore, include sexual intimacy.

That's part of the marriage relationship. It also says, in chapter 2, verse 17, that the woman, the adulterous woman, left the partner of her youth.

[8 : 45] Now, the word partner there means your most intimate and best friend. That's what the word partner means.

Now, what Proverbs suggests is that your relationship with your spouse should be characterised by both torrid romance and sexual intimacy and intimate friendship.

Both of those things. Now, this is incredible for the time that this was written. You see, in traditional societies, when this was written, the purpose of marriage was to gain security and status for your family.

Both husband and wife were trying to marry well as possible in terms of family status. Marriage was also about producing children, which was about producing family status and lineage, carrying on the family name.

And if you manage to get married and have love and romance and friendship, then, well, lucky you. Good on you. The idea of marrying for love came quite later in history.

[10:02] And in Proverbs, it says that you marry for love. This is revolutionary in ancient culture. In a culture where women had very low status, it says that your spouse here is to be your best friend.

That breaks all the categories of the ancient world. It's historically revolutionary and notable. But let's think about this practically.

The combination of torrid romance and intimate friendship creates a unique relational dynamic.

Friends, think about this, friends are normally side by side, absorbed in a common interest.

And lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other. Like Jimmy and Kate. At the moment. It's interesting what Proverbs is saying here.

C.S. Lewis, he wrote a chapter on friendship in his book, *The Four Loves*. And he suggests that friendship is about a common passion and interest. And he wrote this, friendship arises when two or more discover that they have in common some insight or interest.

[11:21] That is why those pathetic people who, this is C.S. Lewis, that is why those pathetic people who simply want friends can never make any. The very condition of having friends is that we should want something else besides the friends.

Where the truthful answer to the question is, do you see the same truth, would be, I don't care about the truth, I only want you, you to be my friend.

No friendship can arise. Though affection, of course, may. Friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice.

Those who have nothing can share nothing. Those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travellers. Now that last statement is really interesting.

The essence of friendship is having a vision for something that we both want to get to. That's the essence of friendship.

[12:25] Fellow travellers heading somewhere. On the other hand, lovers are absorbed in each other.

What happens when you mix that together? Lovers being the best of friends? Ministry is what happens.

The biblical picture of marriage is a journey towards your partner's, your spouse's future greatness. In fact, it's a journey towards your spouse's future glory.

You see, traditional society, you get married for status. In modern Western society, you get married for fulfilment.

And when you don't get fulfilled, you go somewhere else to get fulfilled. And they're both naive.

Both naive. Let me remind you of the heart of the Christian message.

[13:30] All of us are made in the image of God. This is the biblical picture. All of us are made in the image of God. We are made to be something great, but we're all broken because of sin. We are all shadows of what we were made to be.

God, knowing that we're all broken, comes into our world in the person of the Lord Jesus, lays himself out through the sacrifice of himself on the cross, comes into our lives, unites us to himself through the Holy Spirit.

He applies what he has done, and he shapes us for our future greatness. Eternity in his presence, whole may complete. The great marriage in heaven.

And that gospel message, that Christian message, shapes your view of marriage now. Marriage is gospel reenactment. It's the Christian message reenacted.

Our course, of course, there are things like personal chemistry, but even for the Christian faith, it makes things go, the gospel makes it deeper than that.

[14:29] You see, even things like attraction are much deeper. As a Christian, you're attracted not just to what the other person is, but what they are going to be.

A Christian looks at another and thinks, I see flashes of your future, and they excite me. You see, what they are becoming, and what God is making them into, you see that, you want to be part of that.

Marriage becomes gospel reenactment, because you enter into the life of the other, and you commit yourself to sacrifice, to serve, to help, to minister, so that they get to that destination.

Marriage. With their spouse, the Lord Jesus. That's the picture of the end of Revelation. You want to be part of that journey, part of their journey to that glory, the great marriage in heaven.

You are friends committed to each other's future glory. That's the biblical picture of marriage. It's a ministry mindset.

[15 : 50] The consumer mindset of marriage, which is the picture of dominant in our society at the moment, where you marry for fulfillment, the consumer mindset is the opposite of the biblical picture.

And the consumer mindset says, I will be the spouse that I should be, to the same measure that you are the spouse that you should be. I will promise to do this for you, providing you promise to do that for me.

And so if you're not being the spouse that you should be, then I don't have to be the spouse that I should be. And that isn't the mindset of the gospel-empowered person.

The gospel-motivated, empowered spouse says, I will be the spouse that I am meant to be, even when you are not the spouse that you are meant to be. The power to be like that to another is Jesus, because he has treated you like that.

He loves us not because we are lovely, because he has made us lovely. Isn't that what Ephesians 5 says? Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

[17 : 20] Now, hear me correctly here. I'm not suggesting that marriage is one way and that you're to be a doormat to a spouse.

I think the most unloving thing you can do to an abuser is to allow them to abuse. I think the most unloving thing you can do for a selfish person is to allow them to be selfish.

Iron sharpens iron, and so there is a need to confront your spouse about such behaviours and to take further steps if need be. But you're going to need to be patient.

I mean real patient. Marriage is ministry. It is about service, not fulfilment. And when you seek the other person's good, even when you don't like them, the deeper your love will be.

The less you love them when you don't like them, the less your love will be. Now, none of what I've said is easy to do.

[18 : 33] And the only way to get help here is to look at this in the context of the gospel. How can you stay on a journey with a difficult spouse?

And the only answer, I think, is chapter 2, verse Proverbs 2, 16, 17, wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with the seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant that she made before God.

What we need to see is that we are the adulterous woman. That's what we need to see. We need to keep in mind that Jesus Christ made a covenant with the Father to come to this earth to make us his partners, to make us his spouse.

And when he got here, we crucified him. We crucified him. Jesus jumps into the very worst relationship, a relationship that ultimately sent him to hell.

Some of you might think you're in a relationship that he's taken to hell, but Jesus, he got sent to hell, a relationship with us. That's what it cost him. We need to see him dying on the cross for us, but we also need to see him staying in a terrible relationship with us.

[20 : 00] We need to see him giving us the ultimate faithfulness and love despite of our lack of faithfulness and love. Seeing and experiencing that is your only hope.

And so I would say that if your spouse is the centre of your life, you are going to be a lousy spouse. If you're looking for them to give you what only Jesus can give you, you're going to be a lousy spouse. You're going to treat them bad. If they are the most important thing to you, then you're going to be a lousy spouse.

If your spouse isn't giving you what you think you should need, and in fact only what Jesus can give you, then you'd be so freaked out because they are the source of all your worth and all your meaning and all your happiness and fulfilment and satisfaction.

Unless Jesus demotes your spouse out of the centre of your life, you're going to be a lousy spouse. That's what we keep as a church. And this is for everything. We just keep saying, we need to treasure Jesus, treasure Jesus.

[21 : 09] We're saying it again this morning. Jesus has to demote everything. Has to be the centre. Jesus' love has to so move us and give us the worth and security and hope that we crave so that when our spouse is not what they should be or what we would want them to be, we can in fact continue to handle life.

Only when he is our ultimate are we set free to love and serve and minister to our spouse. So before moving on to parents and kids, just a quick word for those who are wondering how we handle the journey of life when we are not married but we want to be.

There are a lot of people, frankly, who want to be married but aren't. They go to weddings and frankly they can't stand it. What I've just said a moment ago, it just applies for you as well.

If it is true that you're going to be a lousy spouse unless Jesus is the ultimate source of love and significance for you, that is true for you for when you're single too. Marriage isn't the goal.

Let me just say, marriage is not the goal. It's not like you get married and you've arrived. Jesus is the goal. Jesus has to be the ultimate source of love and significance in your life.

[22 : 31] Unless you are content as a single person, let me say, you'll never be content as a married person. Unless you are content as a single person because you already have the ultimate spouse in your life, the one who will get you to your future glory even if no one else signs up to help you on that journey, you already have Jesus.

every other spouse is going to pale in significance. When you're content with being single, you will be a decent spouse.

And when you're not content with being single and see the marriage as the goal of all things, of satisfaction, of fulfilment, all that sort of stuff, then you're going to start making all kinds of wrong choices about the sort of partner you'll have.

Okay. More things to say about marriage but we've got to move on. Family relationships, parents to children. There's a huge amount that can be said here.

Even from Proverbs, a whole lot more can be said than what I'm going to say. Given the time, let's just focus on the main thing. This is the main thing that Proverbs says about this relationship. And if you are more bent towards the conservative edge like most traditional societies, you are going to, you're more likely to suggest that the main thing about parenting is about control.

[23 : 55] If, on the other hand, you're more liberal like most modern Western societies, then you're going to suggest the main thing about parenting is to make sure that you grow your kids up to, with love and affection and affirmation.

What Proverbs says is the main things about parenting is to make your child wise. So Proverbs 23, 22. Listen to your father who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old.

Buy the truth and do not sell it wisdom and instruction inside as well. The father of a righteous child has great joy. A man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.

May your father and mother rejoice. May she who gave you birth be joyful. So the main job of a parent is to teach your children what is good, what is bad, what is right, what is wrong, what is wise, what is unwise.

That's the main thing about parenting. And the number of us, let's be frank here, a number of us have jettisoned some, potentially even much, of what our parents have taught us about what's right and wrong.

[25 : 00] However, what makes you able to come up with an alternative understanding of what is right and wrong is the fact that your parents taught you anything in the first place.

If you have parents who have been firm, have a coherent understanding of what's right and wrong that they themselves live by and you know that they delighted in you no matter what, you've been raised.

Now even if you go a totally different direction in life, you've still been raised. Your parents are not guilty of parental malpractice.

Now it's a different matter if parents lived inconsistently, they didn't delight in you, they didn't train, they didn't discipline, they didn't teach, they didn't navigate, they didn't guide.

Proverbs would call that parenting malpractice. And so some of you who are now parents whose kids have grown up and are going in different directions, making different choices, you need to probably start feeling less guilty for that if you have at least set a course for your kids but they've chosen a different direction.

[26 : 29] Stop beating yourself up about it. Some of you, however, have set no course or direction for your kids and gone off in whatever direction you might need to feel a little bit responsible for that one. Proverbs 22.15 makes, gives us the key ingredient to making your child wise.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far away. Now, what that's saying is that children are by nature unwise.

Their life will be a disaster unless you intervene and you give them wisdom. Now, the intervention here in Proverbs 22 is called the rod of discipline.

Now, the word discipline here means literally to coach. It's a combination of discipline instruction.

Now, the word rod means to take authority.

It doesn't always mean corporal punishment. You see, one of the great dangers of reading the book of Proverbs and just picking out your favourite proverb, like you're about to belt your kid and you're saying, well, you know, discipline my child, you know, the rod, this is not a rod, kid, so be grateful.

[27 : 50] You need to understand the nuances every time a word pops up and certainly here every time a word like, for instance, rod, we think it automatically means to smack, corporal punishment.

That's what you all thought, wasn't it? Automatically, corporal punishment, boom. Now, it's included at times but not all times. There's a famous proverb that says, start children off on the way they should go and even when they're old they will not turn from it.

That's 22.6. Now, many commentators suggest the nature of training there is to fit the nature of the child. I've got three daughters, they're all very different.

Some children sideways glance and boom, they're on the floor and they're a mess. They're all over the place. Well, that's all that one's needed. Another one can stare you down.

You know, any sort of threat at all and they're just adamant. There's no way there's going to be any tears here. I'm just going to show you who's in charge. That's just my family.

[28 : 54] I've got no idea. If you think the corporal punishment is the universal answer, you've totally missed the point of Proverbs and the biblical understanding of child rearing.

Your child needs to know that you delight in them no matter what. Your child needs to have a coherent understanding of right and wrong and I would argue that's a biblical understanding of right and wrong and your child needs to see you consistently living that out.

Quick word. Dads, take responsibility here to lead your family, to lead your kids. And secondly, kids' church doesn't do that for you.

It's your job. It's your job. You want to instill spiritual wisdom in your kids, you've got to do it at home. We only just partner with you for a little fraction of your child's life here at Kids' Church.

Okay. That's the main way that parents relate to children. Now, what about children relating to parents? In Proverbs and in the rest of the Bible, there is one key word that comes up again and again to describe the main thing about this relationship and it's the word honour.

[30 : 21] honour. The opposite of honouring is to despise. Now, you probably know this is true. It's in the Ten Commandments. Honour your father and mother. Notice it doesn't say love your father and mother.

It doesn't say obey your father and mother. It doesn't say admire your father and mother. It doesn't say trust your father and mother. It doesn't even say have affection for your father and mother. It says honour. Why? Why not love your father and mother?

father. Now, there is an enormous range of transitions that we go through in life in which we relate to our parents. You go from an infant to a toddler to a young adult and then the teenage years and then all that sort of stuff.

In fact, that comes before young adult, teenage years, and then after that sort of stuff. Now, in some of those stages of life, to obey your parents is either absolutely essential, crucial for you, as I would argue, for instance, you know, sort of up to the age of 10, or it's a complete disaster for you, such as if you're 47.

There is just an enormous range of situations in the way that we relate to our parents, and there's also an enormous range of parents as well.

[31 : 44] It might not have struck you, before, but by definition, half of all parents are below average. Argue with that logic. A lot of parents are not great parents, and that is why the Bible is very smart when it says there is one thing that is constant in your relationship with your parents, despite the stages of life, despite the quality of your parents, and this one condition must be fulfilled.

you must honour them. And honour is not a sentimental word, it's an unsentimental word. It means to treat your parents with appropriate weight.

Now let's just, given that most of us here are adults, and some are moving in that direction, once you hit over 30, let's just focus on what it looks like as an adult to honour their parents.

And there are five ways, five ways, at least five ways. Number one, find the appropriate symbols by which you show them respect. Remembering special days, places at the table, you know, even

when my dad comes and visits my home, offer him the head of the table. letting them speak first in certain situations, that sort of thing. Number two, don't underestimate your parents' need to see themselves reproduced in you.

[33 : 22] Any place that you can say, I got that from you and I'm grateful. You know, when my, I was, this is recorded, just recently I was helping my dad build a shed and my mum was grateful that I was there to help my dad build the shed.

I'm slightly more precise on things like levels and measurements than he is. He's pretty good but I'm more precise on things. And mum said, you know, glad you're here to make it happen.

And I said, well, I actually did get it from him. I got my skills from him. Just take it, you know, anytime they see you duplicate it.

My dad compliments me on my driving and I got it from him. He can drive virtually anything. You put him in a machine, you can drive anything. Got it from him. My incessant cleanliness and tidiness and order, I got it from my mum.

Not from my dad. Got that from my mum. Don't underestimate your parents need to see themselves reproducing you. Number three, don't stereotype them. They can change. People can change.

[34 : 31] Just because they were always like that up until the time you left home doesn't mean they're like it now. They can change. Number four, you have to forgive them.

If you stay resentful at your parents, your life will be distorted. And some of you might have lost your parents long ago, but you're still angry with them about something.

And if you are, they are still controlling you. They're still controlling you. And if you're still mad at them, you're still operating like the child.

One of the ways to break that is by forgiving them. Number five, and this is the most important one, the way to honour them is to be liberated enough from them to be able to say, I don't need your approval anymore.

I don't need your approval anymore. If you've had really great parents, you can spend the rest of your life trying to please them by being like them, or you might have had really bad parents and you spend the rest of your life resenting them.

[35 : 43] Either way, you haven't left them. Either way, you haven't left them. You haven't grown up and therefore you haven't really honoured them.

A number of years ago, about five, six years ago, I spent most of my life attempting to get my father's approval, where he would say that I'm proud of you and what you become and that sort of thing.

About five, six years ago, sitting in the kitchen over the rectory, mum and dad came and said, just want you to know how proud of we are in you and what you become, who you are as a husband, who you are as a father, who you are as a pastor.

We couldn't be prouder as parents. You know something? It was really nice to hear him say it. I didn't need it. That's what Jesus does for you. I didn't need it.

It was good for them to say it, good for them, and it was good for me, but I didn't need it. Let me just say, this is one of the reasons why the Bible's called on our parents is so, so important.

[36 : 49] You never grow up, you never grow up if you don't need their approval, if you don't get to a point where you don't need their approval. At one point, our parents stood in the place of God for us, they were our complete source of identity and security and significance, but for the Christian, they aren't God anymore.

Through Jesus Christ, who lost his father's delight at the cross, we now have the delight of God the Father. Through Jesus, our true brother, we now have the ultimate family, the ultimate home, the ultimate approval of the ultimate father, and through Jesus, we are now free to honour our parents, we are free to forgive our parents, free not to over-need our parents.

So as I said, something for everyone. We're all kids. Something for everyone. Jesus is the answer for the couple, the married couple, to flourish. He is the answer for the spouse in a difficult marriage.

He's the answer for the single person wanting to be married. He is the answer for the parents seeking to impart wisdom and for the child seeking to honour their parent. Amen.