

The Growth of Marriage

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Date: 07 June 2026

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Last week, Steve finished his message by saying that next week, Nick is going to get up and tell you everything you need to know about the hard stuff of marriage.

He'll have all the answers and then smirked at me where I was sitting. And if you get any kind of introduction like that, you've got to have credentials, right?

You might watch a YouTuber or have seen a TED Talk where when they get up, they say, hey, here are my credentials. I've studied this. I've got this relationship.

I know these people. I'm the one you need to listen to. Well, today we're talking about the growth of marriage or growing in our marriage. Here are my credentials that you should ignore.

I've been married nearly 20 years to the most wonderful person in the room, Sam. I have three beautiful children. And here's what you should hold as credentials.

[1 : 07] I've made pretty much every mistake you can think of in marriage. And every time someone who is younger than me, and you might think I look young, but I've been married nearly 20 years and I have made so many mistakes.

And people who want to get married or have been married for a shorter time than me, when they ask, what should I do in this situation or now? I say, well, I can tell you I've made that mistake.

So don't do that. That is the majority of my advice. The credential that I want you to hold on to is the word of God. Because without it, I'm not married for 20 years.

Without the grace of God to me, I'm not married. Without my wife's grace to me, I'm not married.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you speak to us through your word this morning?

And even though we've heard this passage at least five times in this series, please speak to us by your Holy Spirit and change us.

[2 : 11] Help us who are married to hear this sharp, loving word this morning. And help those of us who are not married to hear it as well.

For you love to grow relationships and bring people together as one. For in Christ, we are one. Amen.

When I was young, I lived in a place called Pambula Beach. It's right down the far south coast on the beach. For real. And we could kind of see the ocean.

It was wonderful. One of the houses a little further up the hill, just behind us, was this house. Hope you can see that. It's pretty quirky looking, right?

It's still there all these years later. It's an A-frame house. Two flat walls set on the ground, leaning on each other.

[3 : 16] Now, I remember going on a walk one morning with my dad. I was pretty small. And I remember pointing out that house. That's weird, dad.

Or something like that. And he said, yeah, those houses are built for the mountains. They're built so that ice and snow, when it lands on the roof, slides off.

And the roof never falls under its weight. Now, it never snowed by the sea. And that house was so out of place that I remember it vividly.

And I want us this morning not to remember that house necessarily, but to hold on to that image, because we're going to come back to it. In the previous weeks in this series on the meaning of marriage, we've heard that the sin of self-centeredness and pride is the main hindrance to every marriage.

And if that's true, then without change, all marriages will trend towards ending early. Can we avoid marriage that shrivels into disgust and isolation?

[4 : 25] How do marriages grow? So today we'll see that if you want a growing marriage, then you need to build an A-frame house.

You need two sides for a roof of truth and love and a sure foundation of grace. But leave even one of those out and the A-frame house falls.

Christian marriages grow if both spouses are telling and accepting truth, understanding and expressing love, and experiencing reconciling grace.

They're my three points this morning. Telling and accepting truth. Why the roof of truth? I remember driving home after my first official date with Sam, my now wife.

I remember driving home. I was worried. I wasn't really worried about how it had gone. I was more excited about that. But I was worried about what I'd revealed about myself.

[5 : 39] Did she see any of my many flaws that I was aware of? My excitement was mixed with fear. And years later, when we were married, I remembered that moment as I was driving down that same road.

Sam had just confronted me over the phone about how I always ended arguments whenever I felt like I had won. Shutting her down and hurting her.

She was right. As I was driving, I'd wish she hadn't seen that in me. I was prideful. But I just couldn't ignore it.

Because I was driving home to her. To face her. You see, when two people get married, their flaws become increasingly unhideable.

That's a word. Anytime they're fearful or anxious or proud or inflexible or abrasive, undisciplined, oblivious, impatient, irritable.

[6 : 58] Their spouse witnesses this. Often bearing the brunt of it. Underneath these flaws are sins.

The Christians are called to deal with and not hide. Now, how do you feel when a friend, someone who knows you well, points out a flaw in you?

How do you feel? Harmed? Shocked? Grieved? Joyful? Those around us can see our flaws more realistically than even us.

And a spouse sees your flaws better than anyone else. They know them best. Some of our flaws we have absorbed into our very identity.

They're now part of us. Even if we hide them or try and ignore them, marriage digs them all up. I want you to imagine you're in a hospital and you're so sick that they've got to run tests.

[8 : 13] Maybe you've got to give blood or go do some scans. And those tests are collated onto charts and they're put at the end of your bed. And you're just lying there waiting for a doctor to appear and read those charts and reveal what is wrong.

But did the doctor make you sick? No. But their words carry the truth of what was already wrong with you.

Their role is to be the bearer of the bad news so you can heal. Marriage reveals flaws in us rather than create them.

How often though do I witness spouses blaming the other for a flaw the other has seen in them? Just as it's the doctor's goal to not be discouraging but to heal, a spouse's truth-telling is for the healing of the other.

[9 : 17] But unlike the doctor reading that report, our sickness, our flaws are affecting our spouse. The doctor's well.

We're sick. And yet in our marriage, our sickness affects our spouse. Let's pick up our passage today. Our key verses are in and around verse 26 there, where it says that a husband's role is to make his spouse holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word.

Learning to share and receive truth is this washing. Have you given your spouse permission to talk about your flaws?

We heard last week that the purpose of Christian marriage is preparing our spouses for eternity with Christ. And that is no small thing.

It's lifelong and it's huge. So to do so, we must boldly share what is wrong with our hearts and Bibles open. It also means expecting your spouse to bring your flaws to you.

[10 : 40] Or confessing them yourself. So that you can grow in holiness. Now, if you are married here today, I'm going to ask you this.

Have you ever dreamt about being with someone better? Or do you live in fear that your spouse will find someone better than you? Deal with your fear of truth.

And deal with the sin in your spouse and yourself. Your spouse's sin is not them. Your sin is not you. Romans 7.17 is where Paul says that sin lives in us. The Christians are sinful, but counted sinless in Christ. So, perfection in our lives must only ever be expected in Jesus.

[11 : 52] Not in your spouse. Not in yourself. It's an unreasonable self-expectation to live without flaws.

And so, we are called to love the sinner who we marry. To love the sinner we marry, you must together embrace Christ's perfection.

And in that light, deal with your sin. In their book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Tim and Kathy Keller encourage us to call this spiritual transparency.

Spiritual transparency. Many passages in the Bible, like Ephesians 4, 14 and 15, they encourage us to turn from the distractions of our world and the deceptions of the voices around us.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. Regular, reciprocal, spiritual transparency.

[13 : 08] Truth in love grows marriages. So, how can we speak the truth and still love? You may think that the truth only ever hurts.

You may think that truth can't change anything, really, in the end. Or that marriage only needs love to thrive. But the work of Christian marriage is to grow, as Steve said last week, grow as bestest friends who speak the truth in love.

Understanding and expressing love. We're up to point number two. In the book, *The Lord of the Rings*, not the movie, in the book, the character Faramir has a lot more to say.

There's a lot more screen time in the book than he did in the movie. He's one of my favorite characters. And there's a moment where Samwise, the hobbit who's gone along with Frodo on the journey to destroy the ring, Samwise compliments Faramir for resisting the power of the ring.

Faramir accepts this praise by giving his own. Back to Samwise, saying, The praise of the praiseworthy is above all other rewards.

[14 : 41] But Samwise, too, rejects the ring's power for the greater good. Truthful love and affirmation from the praiseworthy is priceless.

Even carrying the power to be healing to us. So, too, when the one you esteem the most, your spouse, praises you with something like, Oh, that's what I love about you.

And greater still is when that same spouse who sees your flaws shows you love. Praiseworthy and truthful.

We can become more convinced of our own dignity and worth as God's love is poured out on us through those we love who know our sin.

Ephesians 5.2 encourages us to walk in the way of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

[15 : 49] That mirrors what we just read in today's passage in verse 25. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Spouses are to reflect Christ in how we love and give ourselves up. So, speaking the truth in love can only occur in a relationship where both give themselves up to understanding and expressing love toward one another.

Here's my big point here. Do you give yourself in love for the benefit of your spouse or for yourself? Do you love your spouse on their terms or yours? Like Christ who showed us the love we needed when he wasn't in need of any love back.

He had everything he needed. And yet he showed love to us the way we need it. Sacrificial spouse-centered love is the other side of our roof for a growing marriage.

[17 : 13] Now, when I was growing up in my hometown in Pambula, this is going to be weird, oysters were currency. Pambula was an oyster farming town.

Pambula and Pambula are basically sister villages sitting next to each other. And then there's a beach and that's Pambula Beach. All those places, if you had oysters, you had cash. They were currency.

Now, you didn't have to like eating them to trade with someone who did like them. Just show of hands, nice and high, who likes oysters in the room? Okay, please take the photo down for everyone else.

Quick, there we go. The way we love is a kind of currency. Sometimes the love currency we receive from someone else is not valuable to us.

Love can be given but not received as love. Just like the rest of you feel no value in receiving oysters. Love must be received as love to be understood as love.

[18 : 23] And so, we need to spend our love using the preferred currency of the one we love. Last week, Steve put up this graphic of C.S. Lewis' four loves.

Romantic love, affection love, charity love, friendship love. Another summary of love currencies is the five love languages. You may have heard of that.

Words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, physical touch. We all want to be loved in our preferred currency.

We give love most naturally in that same currency. But what if our spouse doesn't want to be loved like that?

Or doesn't feel loved like that? What if they are inept to loving us in the way we prefer to be loved? What looks like selfishness could in fact be love given in the wrong currency?

[19 : 28] Are you willing to tell your spouse how you most want to be loved? Or are you willing to exchange your dollars for oysters to ensure that your spouse experiences your love to them, even if you don't understand or appreciate it?

Embrace your spouse with the love they love. And I encourage you, this might be your next step. It might take some vulnerability and bravery to ask, but ask, how may I grow in how I show my love to you? They might say, show me affection.

And then I encourage you to give more of your time, your nearness, assurance. Play or participate in some side-by-side activities with them.

Write them cards or letters. Make more of celebrations with them. Be playful. Tell them how you feel out loud. Avoid being harsh.

[20 : 48] And if they say, friendship, do things together that your spouse loves. Ask them questions and listen. Reflectively answer their questions.

Learn more about their work and appreciate it. Their hobbies and their interests. And work toward becoming their emotional refuge. And if they say, I want you to serve me more.

Well, then do the change that they ask for. Put aside yourself for the sake of your marriage and take note of the service they affirm in you and then keep doing it.

Worship together in church and be generous together. The Kellers say that if your spouse does not feel like you are putting them first, then by definition, you aren't.

And here's one warning sign that you may need to grow in love toward your spouse. Do you have a pseudo-spouse?

[22 : 06] A pseudo-spouse is a person or a pursuit where you give and receive more love than with your spouse. Challenge your disbelief that truth and love can grow and reject whatever your pseudo-spouse is, them or it, for the sake of your marriage.

Truth and love are the roof for a growing Christian marriage. But what if you find yourself in a marriage with one and not the other?

There's truth in your marriage without love. Or there's love in your marriage without truth. Well, truth without love is dangerous because it can leave a spouse weakened.

Without their spouse's love to aid in their recovery and encourage them to grow out of their failures or worse, truth is used as a method of control, shame, power.

Truth, that's truth without love. Anger is often used as a cover for truth. Anger isn't always the problem, but anger must be like a steak, salted so it won't go bad, salted with truth, never weaponized to control or hurt because that is abuse, not truth and love.

[23 : 53] Truth hurts and won't heal without love. love. But by the same understanding, love without truth is similarly damaging.

Keeping the peace is more about avoiding truth than being loving. It leads to shallow relationships based on surface level affirmations that hide deeper bitterness and griefs.

Without revealing or discovering truth and spouses knowing and working on their flaws, marriages will end up built on false love.

Eventually, the truth will come out either in great sin or explosions of bitterness or the complete dissolving of a marriage.

Love without truth is shallow love. And you might be sitting here thinking, how? How am I supposed to be brave enough to tell my spouse about their sin or my own failures?

[25 : 11] how am I supposed to find the strength to ask them to love me better or handle hearing them ask the same of me? We need a foundation for truth and love that will not fall under such a weight.

We need to experience reconciling grace. One last Tim and Kathy Keller quote because it's brilliant. Only if we are very good at forgiving and repenting can truth and love be kept together. This is crucial.

Only if we become very good at forgiving and repenting can truth and love be kept together. Such grace must exist in a marriage as a shared commitment to repent of sin.

Choose to forgive and reconcile by the power of God. Ephesians 4 32 says be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.

[26 : 29] do you see how grace in the forgiveness of God in Christ is our power for forgiveness?

Just as our motivation to share the truth and give love flows from Christ giving himself up for us so he is our source of the power to forgive for he is the only perfect person and yet while undeserving of the punishment of hell for sin he graciously offers to exchange that perfect life that is his freely with your life of sin with anyone who would follow him as their risen king in Jesus is complete forgiveness from God and so we who have been forgiven much are empowered to forgive much strangely those we love are often the hardest to forgive this is probably because the harm are done from one spouse's actions against another it just hurts more than everyone else they're meant to love you the most they know you the most and they can do the most damage and so making a choice to forgive such great hurt requires us to grow in grace in mark 11 25

Jesus commands that we choose to forgive even as we pray to God about how we're hurting before we've confronted those who hurt us take note of the order choosing to forgive is the start and then in Matthew 18 those hurt by sin or witnesses of sin should seek to confront and restore only taking this need for repentance public if this person does not repent sin is to be rooted out in the context of a relationship with forgiveness the goal of confronting a sin or even the potential for sin in someone's life is for reconciliation of that person to

God and to you never to punish or control it demands grace from you to bring truth in love and it demands grace in them to receive truth in love unforgiving spouses cannot bear the truth and so withhold grace and such a house cannot stand it'll fall under the weight so we need to grow in the power of grace in our marriage how do we do that the answer is grow in humility God did not ask us to earn our spouse's love back when we fail in our marriage but to repent and ask for forgiveness this mirrors Christ who did not demand people earn their way back into God's love but he became their way to be forgiven we're to humbly embody this in our marriage grace from God is reflected through us not created by us to be reconciled any hostility needs to be dealt with with grace by both spouses the wrongdoer needs to repent and ask for forgiveness while the wronged needs to choose forgiveness accept their spouse's repentance and grow in their reliance on Christ's grace to them to be their power to forgive to be their power to show grace there is no earning back love in marriage according to God

God's plan we are to forgive and confront and or repent and ask for forgiveness and both need to humbly pursue reconciliation Ephesians 4 verse 2 says be completely humble and gentle be patient bearing with one another in love growing in humility alongside patience and gentleness both fruits of the Holy Spirit is how we grow in grace love to bear with your own sinful self and your spouse isn't possible without humility humility now here are two warnings really briefly don't over humiliate yourself into self loathing you may raise your spouse's opinion of you so highly that you never speak the truth of your failures or spend your life trying to earn their forgiveness even if they offer it freely that is not humility that is the fear of losing love that eats up truth and don't under humble yourself into self exaltation either even subtly lowering your spouse's value below your own never really giving your love that's not humility that is pride wielding truth that eats up love see how each side need to work together here instead see yourself rightly through the gospel humiliated and exalted in Christ we are so evil and sinful and flawed that Jesus had to die for us and we are so loved that the son of

[33 : 24] God was willing to do that he exalts you to his place with God as you achieve nothing to earn it a key verse in chapter 525 of Ephesians says Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her it's the ultimate display of humility our sins hurt Jesus infinitely more than our spouse's sins

hurt us yet Jesus died so we could be forgiven and so we could humbly forgive so see yourself and your spouse in light of the gospel humbled and exalted in Christ the goal of grace from spouse to spouse must be revealed in truth and love that humbles both in failure and forgiveness this shared act of humility breaks apart unresolved sin and lack of love to make reconciliation and healing possible even inevitable when we fail each other in marriage practice sharing truth showing love and choosing forgiveness as you embrace the grace of

Christ together now you might be in this room today and you're not yet married or you're no longer married but you can carry the blueprint of this a-frame house of truth and love and grace into any friendship any relationship life-giving Christian friendships are built off the same blueprints and if you aren't a Christian why not consider building your marriage with Jesus marriage is better with Jesus at the heart of it so consider following Jesus such a gracious saviour and rest your life on him and if you are the lone Christian in your marriage or you're in a marriage where your spouse will not participate in truth or love or grace take heart your role in your marriage can still bring growth as you display the grace of

Christ in forgiving as you seek to love your spouse as they receive it and as you bravely share the truth with them you display the grace and love of the truth you display the grace and love of the truth Christ himself to your spouse build what you can empowered by Christ who gave himself up for you one day Jesus told the Pharisees married Christians will join him in heaven and marriage will be no more married or single all who love Christ more than any other will be reunited to him as one and until then a married man and woman become one flesh our passage today says one flesh in a oneness that is much more than just sex which is often what we think that means oneness in Christian marriage grows as spouses fulfill their roles which Steve is going to talk about next week there we go that's my handball of that those spouses grow in their oneness in their one flesh together as they build an a-frame house of truth and love and grace in Christ let's pray heavenly father we need your grace in our lives please holy spirit would you grow us so that we may love so that we may share truth in love help us to be a people who display the love and grace of Christ we need your help in this in our marriages in our relationships we thank you that you love us and that you will help us in this amen to be to be to be to be a!
to be