

Marriage and Family Series
What God Has Joined; A Biblical View of Marriage (Part 2)
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Well, it's my joy today to return to the series we started a couple of weeks ago before Palm Sunday and Easter; series on marriage and family. We're going to be looking at this topic over the next several weeks, and then we'll begin a book study together. Now I know when I come to a series like this, on marriage and family, there's going to be a temptation on the part of some of you to feel left out. You say, well, I'm not married. What if you're currently single? How will this study benefit you? Well, first of all, if you're single but want to be married someday, it's pretty obvious. You need to understand, it's crucial for you to understand, God's plan for marriage, and to be working toward becoming the kind of person who'll make the right kind of spouse.

If you believe instead, that you have the gift of singleness, and we'll touch on that at some point. In Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 this idea is mentioned. If you believe you have the gift of singleness and no plan to ultimately marry, you will still have the opportunity to encourage and influence hundreds of married couples during your lifetime. So you too can benefit. In fact, I'll put it this way, a study on the biblical pattern for marriage is in the end applicable in varying degrees and in various ways to every believer. So, I encourage you to listen carefully as we go through this crucial topic to the life and health of the church, and that is, the issue of marriage.

You know, the cynics about marriage abound. You find it in a variety of quotes. A couple I came across this week. One person wrote, "Marriage can be compared to a cage. Birds outside in despair to enter, and birds within to escape." Another wrote "Marriage is when a man and a woman become one. Trouble starts when they try to decide which one." But I think, more appropriate, Martin Luther wrote, "There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage." We all, if we're honest, if we're married, we want a good marriage; and if we're not married, and we're hoping at some point to be married, we want that; and as we look around and we see others who are married, we hope this and pray for this for them. And so, it's crucial that we understand what constitutes a good marriage.

If we want to understand marriage, then obviously there's no better place to come than the Scripture, but in the Scripture, there's no better place to start than at the first marriage. And

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that's in Genesis 2:18-25. What Moses records here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit not only records the circumstances of the first marriage, it also lays down the fundamental biblical convictions about every marriage including your marriage and mine. Let me read this passage for you, Genesis 2 beginning in verse 18.

Then the LORD God said, it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. Out of the ground, the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam, there was not found a helper suitable for him. So, the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. [And] [T]he LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This passage records for us the fundamental biblical convictions about marriage. We began, a couple of weeks ago, to look at these. We looked at the first, and it's this. The first biblical conviction about marriage is that marriage has a divine purpose. Your marriage has a divine purpose. And that purpose is fleshed out here in Genesis 2. Now, as we go through our study over the next several weeks, we'll discover that there are other purposes for marriage that aren't contained here in this passage, but the primary purposes for marriage are here. What are they? Well we looked at them, as I said, a couple of weeks ago.

What are God's primary purposes for marriage? Number 1, relationship. Relationship. Verse 18, "it is not good for the man to be alone." This was a reflection of the relationship that existed within the Trinity. Even in this statement, one person of the Godhead is talking to another person of the Godhead. There has, forever, in eternity been relationship in the person of our God, within the persons of the Trinity. Marriage reflects the importance of relationship.

Secondly, marriage is designed for help. For help. Verse 18 again. "I will make him a helper" And we'll talk more about that when we get to the woman's role next week.

Thirdly, marriage was made for completion. Verses 18-22. He says “I will make a helper suitable for him”. Woman was created to complement the man. Not to say “You, know, that’s a nice tie you have on today, honey”, but to correspond, to fit together, to make up his weaknesses, and he to make up hers. Marriage was designed for completion.

So, marriage has a divine purpose. The primary purposes for marriage are encompassed in those three concepts: relationship, help, and completion.

But that brings us to the second fundamental conviction about marriage that we want to begin with today. And it’s this. Marriage deserves the highest priority. Marriage deserves the highest priority. Notice verses 23 and 24.

The man said, “this is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife and they two shall become one flesh.”

Now what Moses is saying here is that marriage initiates a new, more important relationship than any other human relationship. You see this hinted at in Adam’s response to the woman.

Notice Verse 23. He bursts into poetry, as for the first time he meets his perfect partner. Now, you know, when you read this poem, it does sound a little cold to us. I mean, it doesn’t sound like Shakespeare to us, but loosely translated from the Hebrew, the words that Adam uses in verse 23 could be translated, “Wow! Here’s someone that is a perfect complement to me.” This is the first poetry in the bible, and it certainly begins a long tradition of men composing poetry for the women they love. Notice what he says in verse 23. “This is now ...” A better translation of that is probably “at last,” at last! Remember he had had the other, all the animals march before him, or at least those that were nearest to him there in the garden, and he found not one that corresponded to him. And so now, as God brings Eve to him, he says “at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”. You see, Eve was of the same substance as Adam, yet an entirely new and different being.

The last two lines of verse 23 are typical of Hebrew naming. He says she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Finally, Adam had found someone who shares his nature. Therefore, her title is like his title. In Hebrew, as in English, the words for man and woman are

very closely related. In Hebrew the man is “Ish”, and the woman is “Isha”. Reflects the reality that they share the same substance. They share natures.

Now notice verse 24. This is Moses’ commentary. Moses is now applying the principles of the first marriage to every marriage, to your marriage and mine. This passage is absolutely crucial. It is repeated 3 other times in the Scripture. In Matthew 19 and Mark 10 and Ephesians 5. When you put that together, you’ll notice that the words of Genesis 2:24 occur one time before the fall, three times after the fall, one time in the Old Testament, and three times in the New. What does all that mean? It means that Genesis 2:24 was God’s prescription for marriage in a perfect world. And it also means that it remains His prescription for marriage in a fallen world. This is absolutely key. This is the blueprint if you will, for a great marriage. This is marriage the way God designed it to be. And at its heart, this verse teaches us that marriage is to be superior to all other relationships. Notice the two verbs that describe the marriage relationship. We are to leave and be joined.

Let’s look at each of those a little more closely. First of all, we’re to leave. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother” Now, although Moses gives this command to the man, to the husband, the wife is implied as well, and that’s true throughout the Scripture. He says we are to leave our parents. Now, this traditional translation of the word leave suggests that the man should move away from his parents and set up a home somewhere else. But in fact, a typical Israelite marriage, in a typical Israelite marriage the man continued to live in or near his parents’ home. It was the woman who left her home to join her husband.

So, we need to look a little more at this word “leave”. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “leave” here is used a couple of ways. For example, Israel is commanded not “to leave, or forsake” is the translation, is “not to forsake the poor”, the Levite, that is those who were serving the temple scattered throughout the land, or the covenant. They weren’t to forsake any of those things. God in turn, using the same word, promises not to forsake Israel. Well, I think it’s preferable here to translate this word “leave” as “forsake”. A man shall forsake his father and mother.

Now remember, in the Jewish culture, honoring parents was considered the highest human obligation next to honoring God, and so for a Jewish person to read these words and hear You must forsake your father and your mother, is absolutely shocking. You and I are to forsake our parents. But in a relative sense, not in an absolute sense. This is a common Hebrew form of communication. You’ll remember, in the minor prophets, particularly in Hosea 6, Hosea says,

he puts these words in God's mouth, I deserve, or I desire rather, loving kindness and not sacrifice. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

Now, does that mean that God didn't want the people to sacrifice, that He didn't want them to obey the clear-cut commands to offer sacrifices? No! It was a comparative. He was saying, look, mercy ought to be a lot more important to you than the ritual of sacrifice. It reminds me of our Lord's remarks in Luke 16 where He says, those who want to be my disciple have to, what, hate their father and mother. But in other passages, we're told to love everyone, including our father and mother, even our enemies. So how do you reconcile those? It's a comparative.

Let me tell you what Moses is saying here. His point is this. If you are married, you are to be so committed to your spouse, that in comparison, it looks like you have forsaken your closest blood relatives, your mother and father. In marriage a man and woman's priorities change. Before they're married, their first obligation is to their parents. Afterwards, their first obligation is to one another. Now, this command to leave is often misunderstood, so let me just camp here for a moment. Let me first tell you what it doesn't mean.

It doesn't mean that you should literally abandon or forsake your parents. No, God has commanded that we are still to love and respect and care for elderly parents, even after marriage. You remember in 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul's talking about the widows that are to be put on the list, and he says, listen, if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them provide for her. Because he says, if a man doesn't provide for his own, he's worse than an unbeliever. We have a continuing obligation to our parents even after marriage: to love them, to respect them, to care for them.

It doesn't mean that we need to move a great distance away necessarily. In fact, it's possible to forsake your parents in the biblical sense and still live next door. On the other hand, it's possible to live a thousand miles away, and not have left your parents in the biblical sense. As Wayne Mack writes in his book, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, you may not have left your parents even if they are dead.

So, what does it mean, to leave your parents? What is Moses saying here? Well, let me give you four things it means. These are not original with me. But it means at least these things. It means, first of all, a change of authority, a change of authority. The husband becomes the authority of his own home. First Peter 3:5, wives are to be submissive to their own husbands, and again, we will talk more about that next week.

Secondly, it means a change of dependence. As we saw in 1 Timothy 5:8, neither spouse should depend on their parents for provisions. It's now the husband's responsibility to provide.

It means a radical change in your relationship to your parents, thirdly. A radical change in your relationship to your parents. It means you establish a new adult relationship with them. It means you are more concerned about your mate's ideas, opinions, and practices, than those of your parents. It means you are not slavishly dependent on your parents for their affection, for their approval, for their assistance, or for their counsel. And practically, it means that you need to make sure you eliminate any lingering bitterness toward your parents, or you will be tied to them your whole life, no matter how far away you are. I'll never forget hearing a woman who was 90 years plus still reliving her anger and bitterness toward her mother for how she'd been treated when she was at home umpteen years before. It means you should stop trying to change your mate, simply because your parents don't like the way he or she is.

And fourthly, to leave means a new primary relationship. It means your relationship to one another now takes priority over your relationship with your parents. Let me ask you, do you take more care to preserve your relationship with your lifelong college friends, with your biggest client, with your parents, with your blood family than you do with your spouse? Our relationship with our mate is to be superior to all others. By the way, this is a warning to parents as well. As our children prepare to leave home and to marry, we should be preparing our children to leave and be joined to their spouses. And if they are married, then we shouldn't try to run their lives.

Wayne Mack, as a parent of adult children, gives this good advice in his book: "You must allow the young husband to be the head of his home. to make decisions for himself, to look to his wife not you as his primary responsibility and helper. You must encourage your daughter to depend upon her husband not you for guidance, help, companionship, and affection." Great advice. We're commanded to forsake our parents.

Notice the second verb back in 2:24 that defines this priority of marriage. Not only are we to forsake, but we are to be joined. Be joined to his wife. The Hebrew word for joined literally means to be glued to, or to be stuck to. There's an interesting use of this word in II Samuel 23, where one of David's mighty men, Eliezer, we're told that his hand clung to his sword because he had held it tightly for so long in battle. It was stuck to his hand. That's the idea here. In Genesis 34 we're told that Shechem's love for Dinah was so great that his soul stuck to Dinah. That's what we're talking about. This phrase suggests both passion and permanence should characterize marriage. You should be glued to your spouse.

I enjoy occasionally doing some woodworking, and it's fascinating to see how glue works. How it permeates the two substances and binds them into a new unit. We're to be glued to our spouse. And the result, notice what he says in verse 24. The result of leaving your parents and of being glued to your spouse is this: You become one flesh. Now obviously this refers to the sexual union in marriage. In fact, turn to 1 Corinthians 6 where Paul makes this point, 1 Corinthians 6. He's talking about the reality that our bodies belong to the Lord, and in verse 16 he says "do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her?" And here's his reasoning. For Moses says, "the two shall become one flesh." So the description of one flesh obviously has at its core the idea of the sexual union in marriage.

But becoming one flesh is more than just the physical. One flesh refers to a complete unity of parts making a whole. There are some interesting uses of this word "one" in the Old Testament. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:4, "the shema", that great saying of Israel, we're told "Hear o Israel, the Lord our God is one". And yet God is three persons. Three persons in one, so it is different persons coming together to form a unity. In Numbers 13 it's used of a cluster of grapes, one. So, this idea is that two parts come together to form a new complete whole. It describes not only the physical aspect of marriage, but the spiritual and emotional relationship of marriage. Sheila and I have often described our marriage, in God's grace a wonderful marriage, as: "I don't know where I stop and she begins." That's the way marriage is supposed to be. The two become one. No longer he and she but we.

And the physical union in marriage is only really a picture of the reality of two lives sharing everything in total intimacy. So, let's just be honest. That kind of oneness, that kind of two parts becoming one, is difficult to achieve in this life because of our sinfulness. Well, let me tell you just in terms of pastoral counseling, when couples come to me and complain that there are problems in their physical relationship, rarely is the real problem there. The physical relationship instead is a great barometer of the condition of the marriage. If there are problems there, it is merely a symptom of other issues.

You can see this powerfully illustrated back in Genesis 2. Notice verse 25. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." That verse pictures the perfect comfort that existed between Adam and Eve. It was the fruit of their perfect love for one another. But it's not surprising that this perfect comfort they enjoyed was the immediate casualty of the fall. Immediately, after their sin, what did they do? They sought to cover themselves. Why?

Well, clearly part of it was the sense of guilt they felt before God, but there's another component as well. As soon as they sinned, they were no longer comfortable with each other. The fig leaves symbolized an attempt to hide from each other. As one writer puts it, "when sin entered the picture, their openness, transparency, and total oneness were destroyed". But as Christians, it should be our goal in marriage to recover the reality of what it means to be joined into one flesh; physically, spiritually, emotionally; two parts becoming one. And the bottom line is that our goal should be to make our marriages superior to all other human relationships. It must be the priority. You say, well, how can I know? Well let me give you a simple, 2-question quiz. Here's a 2-question quiz. See how you do.

Question number 1: Are there people in your life whom you know better, enjoy more, spend more time with, talk to more than you do with your spouse? If so, then your marriage to that extent is not the priority in your life.

Second question: Do you spend more time in the typical week pursuing your own interests, activities, or hobbies than you do cultivating a better relationship with your spouse? Again, that reveals whether or not your marriage is really the priority in your life.

Now, on a very practical note. What are some of the primary distractions that can keep us from making marriage what it ought to be in our lives, the primary human relationship? What are some of the things that can pull us away from this priority? These aren't inspired, but let me just tell you from my own experience a couple of things that can often be enemies of the priority of marriage.

First of all, career, or work. This is a biggie, career or work. Some of you have experienced this personally. If you were to ask Sheila and me about the nature of our relationship, we both would say, unequivocally, that God has graced us with an absolutely wonderful marriage. We can't imagine two people being more well suited, or better more intimate friends than we are. But if you ask us what was the most difficult time in our marriage, we can point back to that time. One of the greatest joys in my life was being a part of the Master's Study Bible project, because not only was I involved in that project, but I had my normal responsibilities to carry on, and I had a large class I was pastoring, about 300 people. And so, there was literally more to do than I could do, and so I got up early in the morning, worked before I ate a quick bite of breakfast, went to work, came home, locked myself away again, and studied until it was bedtime, to start the same process again. Working that way seven days a week for the better part of 8 to 12 months. And I

can tell you that it was extremely difficult on our marriage. That was the period of time when our marriage was at its low point.

By God's grace, when that project ended, we went together, got away just as a couple, and reconnected in every sense. But it was hard. It was a struggle. Listen, work and career can be a terrible enemy. Even good things, like ministry, can be a terrible enemy to your relationship with your spouse. A friend of mine, Bob King, did a survey of people that he worked with in a retirement home. He'd go and serve these people in this retirement home and he did an informal survey and he asked them this question. He said, what do you regret? You know, you're now toward the end of life. What are your regrets? He said something to me that I'll never forget. He said, you know what. Not one of those people ever said to me "I just wish I'd spent more time at the office."

Another distraction from the priority of our marriage is general busyness. We live in a world where we scurry about constantly from work to soccer practice, to laundry, to yard work, to scurrying to have fun. Even too many church activities. That, by the way, is one of the reasons, one of the main reasons the elders and I moved, consolidated our weeknight activities as much as possible to Wednesday night. Because we didn't want to be pulling families apart every night of the week. Work at simplifying your life. You're busy, I'm busy, we're all busy. But work at simplifying your life. And whatever you do, don't sacrifice your marriage on the altar of busyness.

A third distraction that keeps marriage from being the supreme relationship is inlaws. This is one of the top three marriage counseling issues. And there are really two great dangers when it comes to inlaws. The first is just spending too much time with them and not spending enough time with your spouse. And the second is talking to your inlaws negatively about your spouse. This can erode the priority of your marriage.

A fourth distraction, and if you have children, you understand this one. It is children. Children can easily become the priority of our home, just because of the sheer noise level. The squeaky wheel gets the oil, and children are by far the squeakiest. But remember, as important as our children are, and as important as it is that we shepherd their little lives toward Christ, they are only in our homes for about 18 years. In some cases, a little longer, and then they are gone. So, don't let your kids distract you from your marriage. The reality is a large number of divorces occur after the kids leave home. And it's because the couples realize they've lived under the

same roof; they've eaten meals together; but they've neglected their marriage; and all they had in common was the kids. And now the kids are gone, so maybe we should be two.

What are some practical ways then, looking at the flip side? What are some practical ways to continue to make your marriage a priority?

Number 1: Commit yourself to growing in your relationship with Christ. Commit yourself to growing in your relationship to Christ. You see, a good Christian marriage is based on a mutual walk with the Lord. We're going to look at Ephesians 5 the next couple of weeks, and it's fascinating because you have that information about how wives are to relate to their husbands; how husbands are to relate to their wives. But just a couple of verses before that what does it say? Be filled with the Spirit. You see, the only way to have a marriage that's the kind of marriage God prescribes is for both of you to be filled with the Spirit. For both of you to be honoring the Lord and His word, to be growing closer to the Lord. Like the two sides of a triangle, as people grow closer to the Lord they grow closer to each other.

A second practical way to make your marriage a priority is to develop a "we" mindset. You know the Bible describes us as one flesh, a new complete whole. Start thinking about we and us, and not his and mine. You can tell troubled marriages, or those headed that way if they are always saying things like "he thinks, but I" or "my money, my time." Couples always doing things separately, including taking vacations separately.

Thirdly, spend time together. This is obvious. If you're going to make your marriage a priority, you're going to have to spend time together. In other times, in other places, in other cultures, there might be different practical ways to make this happen. In our culture, frankly with the vehicles that take us in different directions, jobs that often take us in different directions, frankly it becomes a priority just to have regular dates with your spouse. Sheila and I had one of our regular dates. We haven't in a little while. We had one Friday night, and we were reflecting again on how important those times are for maintaining our relationship. If you're going to make your marriage a priority, you'd better spend time with your spouse.

There's a third fundamental biblical conviction about marriage that we need to understand. Not simply that marriage has a divine purpose, and not just that it has the greatest priority, but thirdly, marriage has an inherent permanence. Marriage has an inherent permanence. Notice verse 24 again. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." You see, not only is this new relationship of

marriage superior in kind, but it's also superior in permanence. The Lord often uses terms, the terms forsake and be joined in the context of His covenant relationship with Israel. That suggests that God sees our marriages as covenants. And in fact, He states it very specifically. Turn to Malachi 2. God is angry with His people as you approach the end of the Old Testament, and He is angry with them for a number of reasons, but one of them specifically is recorded in Malachi 2:13. He says,

“This is another thing you do:”. [If I could respectfully paraphrase, This is something else that really bothers me.] “you cover the altar of the LORD with tears; with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.” Yet you say, [why? Why doesn't God accept my offering?] “Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion [watch this] and your wife by covenant. [A legally binding promise, made before God and everybody.] But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a Godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife [or husband] or your youth. For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously.”

God's very clear about this issue of hating the separation of marriage, what God has joined. In fact, notice what Christ says about it in Mark 6, Mark 6, I'm sorry, 10:6. Mark 10:6.

“... from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; ...”

Here Christ, of course, quotes Genesis 2, and now He is going to give His commentary, His application of it.

“... so they are no longer two,” he says verse 8 “but one flesh.” verse 9 “... therefore” [here it is] “what ... God has joined together, let no man separate.”

This permeates the New Testament. Romans 7:2, “the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living” And only if he dies is she released. First Corinthians 7:39, “the wife

is bound as long as her husband lives.” So, sticking to your spouse is not about feelings, it’s about obedience. It’s a deliberate choice to make your marriage work. It’s about commitment and promises rather than animal magnetism.

There’s a very common fallacy that’s alive in our land, in our culture, today, and that is, if I get into problems in my marriage, then divorce will solve it. Divorce will solve it. But pursuing divorce so that you can discover some kind of peace or self-fulfillment is not only unbiblical, but it’s just plain contrary to fact.

This week I came across a report called *Does divorce make people happy?* It was compiled by a research team of leading family scholars headed by the University of Chicago’s sociologist Linda Waite. They examined extensive data. In fact, they examined 5232 married adults. They interviewed them in the late ’80s. Six hundred forty-five of those 5200 reported being unhappily married. First of all, that’s encouraging that the number wasn’t higher than that. We’re sometimes told, you know, given the impression by the news media that marriage is an outdated estate, and no one enjoys it. Truth is, only 645 of the 5200 reported they were unhappily married.

Five years later, they interviewed these people again. In that five-year span, some of these people who were unhappily married had separated. Others had divorced. Others had divorced and remarried, and others had stayed together. The results were really astounding. Of those who said their marriages were unhappy, they were unhappily married. Two-thirds of those who stayed married said, five years later, they were actually happy, two thirds. And, in some cases, the issues here were serious issues. And of those who rated their marriages as very unhappy, but stayed together, nearly 80% considered themselves happily married and much happier five years later.

What about those who divorced? Even those who divorced and remarried? The exact opposite was true. After five years the unhappy spouses who chose to divorce or to separate, only 19% said they were now happy. What was the primary factor in helping the troubled marriages stick it out, become better marriages? One word, the researchers said: commitment. Listen to what Waite, sociologist University of Chicago writes.

“When people are intensely committed to their marriages, they invest more in the relationship. They minimize the importance of difficulties they can’t resolve, and they actively work to derogate the attractiveness of alternatives. When people

commit themselves to a marriage for life, barring unusual circumstances, they also have a powerful incentive to understand their partner's actions in the best possible light, and to be an advocate for their spouse as well as for themselves.”

Listen, folks, the facts support making a marriage work, even if you would rate your marriage as unhappy.

And for Christians, as we've seen, the Bible absolutely demands it. Sadly, just as the world begins to jettison a bad idea, some in Christianity begin to embrace it. I recently read a book called *Grace in Divorce* written by a Christian psychotherapist named Les Carter. I mention him and his name. It's not my job to police all of Christianity, but this particular man has now moved into Southlake and hung his shingle here. For a number of years he was the senior psychotherapist at the Minirth Clinic in Richardson, and now he's just down the street in Southlake. In this book *Grace in Divorce* he scoffs at anyone who urges couples to respect and follow the biblical grounds for divorce. In fact, he relates counseling a woman name Sidney. Listen to what he writes.

“Sidney's divorce was not prompted by adultery or abandonment by a non-believer. So, it failed to meet the technical requirements of New Testament teaching. Yet, when an abusive [and by this he means emotionally abusive] or hateful atmosphere abounds, common sense indicates that it is reasonable to seek relief from chronic dysfunction. Particularly if efforts to find relief fail repeatedly. We would like to see marital healing rather than divorce, but we do not show disloyalty to God's teachings by lovingly supporting those who are in such a predicament.”

Listen, folks, what this man believes is not only contrary to fact as the study I just quoted showed you, but it is diametrically opposed to what the Scripture teaches. God says He hates divorce, and will not permit it except for two reasons. One of those is found in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19. It's the Greek word “porneia”, which means sexual deviation with another entity, including, but not limited to adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. And secondly, abandonment by an unbeliever, recorded in 1 Corinthians 7. The unbeliever wants out of the marriage. Paul says you are no longer bound, let them go.

Apart from those two exceptions, God hates divorce as we read in Malachi, and He will not tolerate it. Marriage is permanent. If you're married, you're in this thing for life. And so,

you've got a choice. You can either decide to maintain the status quo, or to work at improving your relationship. And the first isn't really an option because that's disobedience to Christ. So, what does it mean practically? Wayne Mack writes this. I love this.

“It means the wife promises that she will be faithful even if the husband is afflicted with, [and I put it this way, the B period of life] bulges, baldness, bunions, and bifocals, even if he loses his health, his wealth, his job, his charm (I mean you don't have to worry about that). Even if someone more exciting comes along.” [And then he says,] “The husband promises to be faithful even if the wife loses her beauty and appeal, even if she is not as neat and tidy or as submissive as he would like her to be, even if she does not satisfy his sexual desires completely, even if she spends money foolishly or is a terrible cook.”

Now, I'm sure none of you wives are any of those things. But here's the point. God intends that marriage be life's supreme permanent relationship.

Now what about others who may be here today. What if you find yourself divorced for Biblical grounds, or you're widowed. You have to take that as God's best for you at this point in life. That's what God in His wisdom and His sovereignty has determined, and you serve Him and you serve others around you. But if you find yourself divorced for all the wrong reasons, not for those two that the Bible allows, then you need to seek God's forgiveness. You need to seek your spouse's forgiveness. And you need to seek reconciliation if that's possible. In other words, if they are still unmarried, still alive, and if they are a believer.

If you're married, though, here are some practical steps to help you preserve your marriage. You want to preserve your marriage? You want it to be permanent? Let me just give you a couple of practical ideas.

Number one: Take your marriage covenant seriously. You made a legally binding promise on the day you were married. God takes it seriously. You'd better. “What God has joined,” Christ says.

Number two: This is just a practical thing that's come in counseling. Don't threaten divorce. Don't threaten divorce. What usually starts as an idle threat in the heat of conflict, if you allow that to continue, and if you throw that out there, you're going to erode the stability of your marriage, and many who threaten eventually end up following through on it. If you've thrown

that around in your disagreements with your spouse, get alone with your spouse and say, honey, I'm committed to you for life. Whatever comes, we'll make it work.

Thirdly: Don't make or stay friends with those who take divorce lightly. Because what do you think will happen the moment you come and cry on their shoulder when you have some problem in your marriage? Which you shouldn't be doing. We'll talk about that in the coming weeks. Well, but what do you think is going to happen? If they take divorce lightly, they're going to say, "listen just dump the guy. The grass is greener". So, don't make or stay friends with those who take divorce lightly.

Number four: Don't let conflict remain unresolved. As Paul says, don't let the sun go down on your wrath. We'll talk more about that in the coming weeks.

And Number five: Build hedges to protect your marriage. Build hedges. What do I mean by that? I mean, first of all, don't be alone with a member of the opposite sex. Don't go out to meals with them. Don't travel alone with them. It always shocks me to go to lunch somewhere here in the area and see a couple together, a man and a woman, who obviously aren't married to each other, but both have wedding rings on. I'm thinking that's like a prescription for disaster. Commit to tell your spouse if someone's actions toward you make you uncomfortable. Or commit to tell your spouse if someone's actions toward them make you uncomfortable. Your wedding vows probably included the promise that you would remain faithful to your spouse whatever happened until death parts you. So sad, how few take that seriously. And yet even so, there are some shining examples of those who remain committed through the very worst of circumstances. One of those is a hero of mine. His name is Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, B.B. Warfield.

For almost 34 years B.B. Warfield taught at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a world-renowned theologian. In fact, all of his books are still in print. I have the full collection in my library. What most people don't know about B.B. Warfield is that at the age of 25 he married Annie Pierce Kinkead. For their honeymoon they went to Germany, just a few weeks after their wedding. And she found herself caught in the midst of a terribly fierce storm. Lightning struck her, but it didn't take her life. It simply paralyzed her for the rest of her life. For the next 39 years, Warfield patiently cared for Annie until her death in 1915. Because of her extraordinary needs, Warfield seldom left his home for more than 2 hours at a time during all those years of marriage. He loved her and cared for her deeply with all of his heart. As I read that story, my

prayer is that that would be you, and that would be me. May God help us to follow His example and keep ourselves faithful until death, the life's supreme permanent human relationship.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the wonderful gift of marriage. Thank you for Your wisdom, and Lord, thank You for Your Word that tells us what marriage should be like. Lord, forgive us as Your children for sinning against You and against our spouse. Help us to commit ourselves to following the pattern that You've laid down.

Father, I pray for the person here today who is not in Christ. Obviously, this message was not an evangelistic message; and yet, Your word is powerful. It can bring conviction to the heart. I pray that today would be the day that they would come to know Christ. Lord, use Your truth in our lives. Lord, help our marriages to be strong. Help them to honor Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.