

Marriage Enrichment (1) Introduction

Marriage Enrichment

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Bible Text: John 2:1-11
Preached on: Wednesday, February 28, 2018

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Well, good evening. Everybody is just about here. Yeah, the people at home are listening already and waiting for you to sit down, you see?

Good. Well, it's lovely to be here together tonight and I thought I would try it first here in the church. I didn't know how big the group was going to be. If it's, you know, like this we could perhaps do it in the hallway and set it up that way but it would save us a little bit of work but it's easier to have refreshments later on in the hallway if we would stick it there but let's for now, let's start with the singing of 360 and verse 1, verse 4 and 5, "Bless the man that fears Jehovah." I think that will be fitting for family and marriage so 360, 1, 4 and 5.

"Blest the man that fears Jehovah,
Walking ever in His ways;
By thy toil thou shalt be prospered
And be happy all thy days.

In thy wife thou shalt have gladness,
She shall fill thy home with good,
Happy in her loving service
And the joys of motherhood.

Lo, on him that fears Jehovah
Shall this blessedness attend,
For Jehovah out of Zion
Shall to thee His blessing send.

Thou shalt see God's kingdom prosper
All thy days, till life shall cease,
Thou shalt see thy children's children;
On Thy people, Lord, be peace."

You can really learn something from a psalter. We know that it starts with the blessedness of the fearing of God and walking his his ways and then goes on to the family, and then notice the last verse, the family is the key to the prosperity of the kingdom, "Thou shalt see God's kingdom prosper," and how important that the Scriptures recognize that link between the kingdom of God and the family.

Now from Scripture, let us turn to John 2 and I'll read verse 1 through 11.

1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: 2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. 3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. 4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. 5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. 6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. 9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, 10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. 11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

So let's together pray.

Lord, we thank thee for bringing us here together in this evening hour and thou knowst the purpose for which we are gathering here, desiring also to share with each other studies and increased understanding of the marvelous institution of marriage life, Lord, the gift that thou hast given to us here present, a gift thou hast not given to everyone even in our own church family, and may it please thee to bless us all tonight with a refreshing understanding of what are some of the main purposes for which thou didst institute and design marriage and, Lord, then we are never to alter marriage, to learn and to be refreshed and to be recharged or challenged about these matters of our marriage life. So we pray also for others who are listening at home tonight that this may be a blessing for us all and it may cause thy kingdom to prosper for thou hast indeed already pointed out tonight the link between strong marriage and the prosperity of thy kingdom. So Lord, look upon us all, guide us in our thoughts and in our discussions, and may it all indeed to be redounding to thy glory and honor, pardoning all our sins. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So I have a little outline here, if you just grab one of those, and those of you who are listening at home, if you see on the website, I think it's there, Emily put on the outline on the website so people that are listening at home can also read or write along.

So thank you for coming here tonight. I'm even surprised how many you are here and I appreciate that, by the way. It's nicer to talk to people than not to people, but I also realize there are quite a number of those listening at home, maybe even beyond what we have realized tonight, and that is my purpose. I sometimes struggle to communicate on a larger basis the basics of married life and do a lot of marriage counseling and a lot of talking to people on individual basis and that's all good and well but you can accomplish so much more if you do this on a much more wider way and you take it along as you do tonight and work on it in your own private marriage life.

So again for those who are listening also at home, I've got my phone right here and this works quite well nowadays with cellphones, so if you have a question, you say, "Hey, it'd be nice to discuss," then it's possible to just text me and those of you that don't have my phone number, here it is: 920-791-1327. So I'll repeat that: 920-791-1327 and I will just read your question and I don't announce who wrote the question so that gives you a little bit of, well you could say that you're anonymous about your questions because we're still a little shy to ask questions in groups, aren't we, because everybody thinks the question is about my marriage, and it probably is but so what? We're all learning here and we're all being together to learn. So again, thank you for coming and being here.

Now what is the rationale for these sessions? I have four of them here. The first is some sobering facts about married life. Within our country and culture, marriage is on a rapid decline. That's not new to you, of course, but that is something that is affecting our young people's thinking as well. In my son's classroom, what 20 kids or something like that? And three of them are living with their own biological parents, that's including David. So this is the society we're living in and marriages are failing everywhere. We know that the divorce rate is over 50%, that's twice as high as in the 1960s when my life began in 1961, and today about 50% of Americans decide to get married and a larger majority is beginning to decide not to marry anymore. So that's sobering. We need to realize that and that's, I think, why it's important for us and our children to have very strong instruction about marriage from the early stages on already in their life because they're not getting it from the culture that we used to get at least our parents did. Most young people today don't get married anymore. In the 1960s, about 0% of couples lived together before they married. Today that's over 50%. They're not married, they're living together, cohabitating and they have all kinds of reasons for that, they want to find out whether first, you know, the chemistry is gonna work out before they tie the knot, as it were. So that's quite alarming and around us, of course, the society is completely beginning to dismantle the institution of marriage by redefining it as well.

So that's one of the rationales that maybe you say, "Well, that's outside of our doors." That's wishful thinking and there is a lot of premarital activity going on in our young people before marriage which is really quite alarming when you begin to think about some of the things I get to hear of young people on their first and second, third dates already. So again, our young people are growing up in a society where all the morals are basically gone out of the door about married life and for us parents, it is the task to bring up our children quite well.

Now what the numbers don't tell is interesting too, that the cure which they are, you know, a lot of young people decide no more to get married. Why is that? Because where parents failed, they've grown up in divorce, they've come from a broken homes, why marry? So that's the decision they're making. Now the cure not marrying is worse than the disease and that's also showing up more and more. Living together before your marriage doesn't really resolve the problems. It all actually begins to show in counseling and in statistics it makes it worse because there is no true commitment. It's like you're trying it out, we can walk away from each other whenever we want to. There's no commitment which God meant to be there. So again, society is not curing the problem by their solution, and even more interestingly, being unmarried is statistically showing to be the worst of the choices you could make financially, health-wise, happiness factor. It's very interesting that married couples usually having a larger savings at their retirement age than single ones that have lived their own, for their own life their whole life and never never have anybody to share their riches with. They have usually less money. So that's interesting, isn't it, that marriage is good for lots of things, even for that. Lastly, the numbers that the number of married people who are happy is still 62% in our nation. So they are sticking out in the marriage, still 62%. So again, the numbers are telling you that marriage as God instituted is still delivering the best if it, indeed, also is, yeah, lived in the way we should live it.

Now that's the first reason. So we're having a huge cultural issue around us that is certainly trickling into the mindset of our children. The second reason for these talks that I thought was, we have a rising dysfunctional generation of young adults. Here is a statistic that really blew my mind. In the 1950s, in 1950 as a matter of fact, there were 150 teenagers in the United States that ended up in trouble with the law, 150 only. Forty years later, this was not applied with 14,500%. In 40 years, one generation, the teenage delinquencies and juvenile problems have increased with gigantic numbers. Now why is that happening? Did teenagers suddenly get more depraved? Did they suddenly become much more evil? That's not the case. There's something happening to their growing up years. There's something happening to the way they've been cultured and that's the marriage life, the family life. So teenage pregnancy and subsequent abortions of teenagers have skyrocketed. Why is that? Because teenagers want love so they seek it anywhere, somebody offers it, they'll take it and end up getting in pregnancy, of course, can't sustain a pregnancy so they end up choosing abortion. Now what's the real problem is the families. We're trying to decrease abortion, the real only solution of that is the family life in which these children are nurtured and cared for and will not begin to take risky decisions about seeking to fulfill their love and ended up being pregnant. So again, the world is not getting it, isn't it? We need to concentrate on our teenagers and our families and, again, if we don't focus our attention on our families, we will grow up with a dysfunctional generation of young adults as well.

Third reason. After 23 years of marriage, marriage, yeah that too, but after 23 years of being in the pastoral ministry, I make some shocking discoveries as I work with our church family. Every time and I have a premarital counseling, you know, journey to go through, I sometimes ask the young people who are getting married, I say, "Well, you

know, give me some indication where you think your parents' marriage sits on the rate between 0 and 10," and I go through the dysfunctional and functional marriages, kind of give them a little feeling of what is a good marriage and what is not, you know, the numbers I get are sometimes very shocking to me. Very shocking. Now you could, well, that's a young person's perspective of a marriage that they don't know anything about yet. Okay, there may be something in that but it also shows me that really there is a lot of dysfunctionality in our own marriages. They're mediocre. We don't believe in divorce correctly so divorce is taboo, so we are not seeing the numbers of marriage breakdowns in our circles but that does not mean that what stays together is good, and that reality often really hurts me.

So there are really three reasons that I took out of that mediocrity that I see. First, the reason I want to do this with you is a sense of compassion. I feel compassion for our young people. I feel hurt when I see many of them growing up in families that are rather dysfunctional and then they launch into adult life being totally unequipped and if we want to see changes for the kingdom of God, we need to make sure our children are equipped to handle adult life and marriage life, and where does that start? It starts in good marriages, wonderful relation between husband and wife, and then from there on the family life.

I also feel compassion and hurt for the many dysfunctional couples. When I meet with situations in my counseling where you see that the marriage is really not working out well, it's not their fault, it's often in repeat and repeat and repeat, right? It rolls on from generation to generation. Now I have been tremendously blessed in my life with an excellent role model in my family. My mom and dad, their marriage wasn't that long, 27 years I think before they parted through death, but their marriage in which I grew up has given me a head start because it was so well functioning and filling me with the equipment I needed.

So when I see struggles in other people's adult life and I see where they're coming from and we track out where they're coming from, then it is often repeat, repeat, repeat. So a really powerful statement by one counselor when he says the present never undoes the past but the past often undoes the present, and it catches up with you.

Gary Smalley in one of his marriage lectures makes this comment. He says he's done the marriage lectures for many years, I read this years ago, he says, "Every time I begin a marriage lecture with young couples, I have a list of 10 things that we need to prioritize. What are the 10 things that influence your marriage the most?" And he says it's always interesting when you get these young couples that they put family background on number 10. "When I have a refresher course," he says, "10 years later and I get the same couples back in I give them the same list, guess what happened to the list? Family background goes from 10 to 1 in nearly every case," because you and I don't realize how much we are shaped or warped, maybe that's also a good word to use, by what we grow up with and then you don't realize that until you get into the stress of a relationship and marriage life and family life and kids, and then the thing unravels and you discover. Yeah?

So the third reason that I feel these marriages need attention and what motivates me to pour my energy into this, is actually sometimes a little righteous anger at the adults who fail to stand up to the plate and begin to focus on beginning to put their life together in order to give their children the best start possible. You know, maybe righteous anger is not so often expressed but I sometimes feel very righteously angry when you notice this situation and you say, "Come on now, I mean, let's get our act together. Let's begin to learn and relearn and unlearn so that we will give our children the best possible start in life."

Now lastly, the last rationale is, of course, from the Scripture I read tonight. Why did I read John 2? Well, Jesus begins the first miracle in a marriage situation. As a matter of fact, this is in some way his first public act and what's interesting that he didn't do this in the temple, he didn't do this in the political sphere, he didn't do it in a religious context, he did it in a family context. And Arthur Pink is correct when he made the comment, I believe it was he who made that comment, that this is not just coincidental, this is symbolic. Christ is coming to build a new kingdom and where does he officially start? With the family. And this situation of need that arose there in this family, obviously it has different meanings, but his presence on the marriage, beginning day of this marriage, turned it from water into wine and the thought is beautiful, friends. The foundation of the kingdom is a solid marriage and a family life and only when Christ is present and when we are obedient to Christ's words will our marriage go from water to wine. Now water is quite quenching, it's quite satisfying and I don't want to push the analogy too far, but wine is much more tasty. Yeah? But don't take this too literal, obviously, but I hope you understand the idea behind it, that where Christ is and where his word is obeyed, there the marriage life definitely is transformed.

So your and my command under which we are under is to show love to the household of faith first. I thought of that statement, Galatians 6, we are to show love to the household of faith. Now I would like to take one application out of that. Where am I to show all my love and all my devotion first? That's in my marriage life. The household in which I live, my spouse, my children need to have the lion's share of our attention and I'm looking at you men, for females that's perhaps a little bit more natural, right, to do, but we men don't have that natural tendency to devote our lion's share of attention on our families and on our marriages. What do we usually do? I'm looking at you with a twinkle in my eye because I'm just the same way, right? Work. Work. Work. Work. And more work and whatever time we have left, that's for the family. Correct? And I get in trouble, of course, when I say this is wrong because now she's going to remind me of this, my wife's sitting here, she's going to remind me of this every day next week, you know, the primary thing is family but isn't that true?

I made a very beautiful discovery the other day when I was studying for the topic on "I feel guilty when I relax." It was eye-opening to me. One of the things I learned in that is there are two different words in the Greek for time, the word "chronos" and the word "kairos." Chronos is obviously chronology so that's a time in which we live by the clock. We have that, we have appointments to keep. In that context by the way, that God did not invent minutes and God did not invent hours, but God only invented days and a day is a

once in a lifetime gift. One day. That's a strong point, isn't it? You never think about a day that way, it's a once in a lifetime gift. You never get a day back again. And there is some point to the chronos time but then there's the other word, it's called kairos time. That's time that's defined by quality of relationship. That's the time that God actually spent most of his priority on. He doesn't live by chronos, he lives by kairos. I'll give you one example where we see them illustrated. Martha is living on chronos time, gotta make this meal and got only an hour, two hours to do that. Mary is living on kairos time. She says, "Forget about everything else. I'm gonna sit on the feet of Jesus at this moment. That's more important than that meal. That can wait." You read about these people who go for three days in the wilderness with Jesus. We Westerners think that's a little overdone. Three days no work. They're living on kairos time, okay? They don't live on chronos time. And after three days Jesus finally says, "It's time to prepare some food for these people because they're staying with us." Now can you imagine you doing that? Drop your working for three days, follow this preacher? Because we live on chronos time. We have all these things to do and, my friend, well, let's be honest, at the end of our lives is chronos time gonna make a difference or kairos time, relationships with our loved ones, with our children, with our family? That's what really obviously with God.

So that was challenging to me and has given me a lot to think about. Now the evening said that I will spend with you here is basically divided up like this: we will spend 35-45 minutes, I will not speak longer than that, then we'll have a 10 minute break to get some refreshments and then we'll have some time together to have some discussions on the questions and answers. If there are not questions, this time there are not questions provided, next time I might provide some questions so we can discuss. Then, of course, that will be a little harder for those who are listening to us but we can perhaps, you know, share whatever can be done on the tape as well.

Now let's tonight look at Marriage 101. Marriage. So let's turn to Genesis 1:26-27. Let's listen first to God on these few Scriptures that will define for us something that in some way we probably all know, let Scripture be reminded of. So I'll read Genesis 1:26-27.

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it

And that kind of carried it over into the cultural mandate, so we'll leave it from there. For your interest, in verse 27 we both are created in the image of God as male and female, and the word "male and female" in the Hebrew has the literal meaning of "masculinity and femininity created he them." That goes a lot deeper than male and female, male and female that you think about bodily things, but masculinity and femininity, you think about your internal mindset, your way of thinking, the way we are to say popularly, the way we are wired is entirely different as a masculine person or a feminine person, both

created in the same image of God. God is neither male nor female though he uses a male wording to represent himself as a father and a he, but nothing that God is more male or more female. God is making the male and the female both bearing his image in different ways. Together the unity of the male and the female and now it comes into the marriage, is the full reflection of the image of God; that both of them are carrying different attributes in different ways reflecting that.

So that for that, now let's turn to Genesis 2 and we'll read verse 18, important to pull this in. Genesis 2:18,

18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

How interesting that on the sixth day God himself said, "There's something not good in my creation and I will make an help that is meet for him." And then God gave Adam the task to give all the animals a name, and he did that mostly to discover to Adam his own loneliness because in verse 20,

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

So instead of God telling Adam, "You should not be alone," he discovers it to Adam as we all discover it as we grow up and as we become an adult, we begin to have these desires for each other and particularly for companionship.

So then,

21 ... caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam instantly recognized this is a different creature than all the animals he'd seen.

23 And Adam 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. [Then comes the marriage command,] 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Then with one jump to the book of Ephesians, we'll take also Ephesians 5, the last verse only at this moment, not the last verse, it's verse 31 and 32 where this verse from Genesis 2 is repeated,

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

So let's consider these verses in the four reasons why God instituted marriage and this is not totally new to you but the purpose of tonight is that you and I would re-look at our marriage and say, "Am I actually fulfilling these purposes? Am I focused on fulfilling these purposes?" Isn't it kind of like we all are married and we're just married and we just go through the motions and we just go through the life and the frustrations and the struggles and perhaps the conflicts and all the confusion and we have lost purpose?

Now those of you in business, you have a purpose. You know what you want to reach, where you want to go. You make your plans, you readjust your plans, right? That's what you do in the business life. Did you know that only 3% of all married couples have ever sat down to write down their purposes for their relationship? I hope you are all that 3%. I don't know your answer on this, but that's really a shock. That means we just jump into the marriage boat and we'll just live in the marriage boat and we don't really have a distinct purpose in mind, and maybe your purpose that you have subconsciously in mind is not in line at all with God's purpose.

So that's why I thought we'll start tonight with this little review. So there's four reasons why God instituted marriage. First, God instituted marriage to provide us companionship. That's the number 1 reason that he stated in Genesis 2:18. Not to provide kids, to provide companionship. We are people that are lonely when we are alone. Let's think of our single people. Do not so often forget as we so often tend to do. It's not easy to be single. That's a lot of loneliness. That's not everybody's choice and not everybody's gift either to live alone, right? But if you have a companion.

Now think about it, if this is the primary reason why God gave me to enter into the married state, now look at your wife or look at your husband and ask yourself, "Am I providing him or her every ounce of companionship that he or she is to receive from me because that's why God placed me into the marriage?" Probably the onus of this question lies on those men, okay, right, because women are far more relationship oriented than we are and so as they are craving our companionship, let's be honest, we guys do quite well with less companionship than what they do. Correct? Right, I see shaking heads and smiling faces. But that's not how it should be. It's not what I want, it's to be the gates of what I need to do. I need to look at the person that sits next to me and God has said, "I provided you for each other's companionship."

So think through this first statement: we are to leave our father and mother and we are to cleave unto our wife and we are to weave together with each other. Now leaving is obvious, you let your parents go, the priorities change. Cleaving is commitment. Even when they fail, even when they don't turn out to be exactly what you thought they were going to turn out, even if you discover finally, "Hey, I did end up marrying a stranger, that I didn't have a clue what kind of a person he actually was until I'm now married," you cleave, you're committed. He's shaking his head. You have a lot to discover yet. I'll

come back to that in a moment but commitment, isn't it, that's gone today? That's why marriages break down, they're not committed to each other. We're having a consumerism attitude in our country about marriage. "Well, if it doesn't work out, you just should start a new one." That's not the way it is meant to be.

Now the second one is weaving, the last one. Leaving, cleaving, and they shall be one flesh, it says weaving. Now that's many years of learning to live together. Now this weaving or this one flesh, of course, friends, is far more than just the sexual relationship in marriage life, this is the merging together of the minds and the thoughts and the purposes and the life journey, and that's what makes losing a spouse after that journey of marriage, you know, the common expressions, "I've lost my better half." Well, that is a good statement. If I hear that, then that means that was a real good marriage, they're just ripped apart from one another. But that's growing over years.

Now, secondly, so please be prepared for this: marriage is God's call to serve one another and to love your closest neighbor. Whoever thought that married life was going to be easy? We all think that but married life is a call to serve one another and that is 100%. This is a call to deny yourself and to devote yourself to the significant other person that God has placed next to you. To me, the model of that is the Lord Jesus Christ, "who though he was God, counted it not robbery to be called equal with God but made himself of no reputation." Why? To serve. He was only here for one reason and he is only there for one reason in heaven, it is to serve his bride.

Now that's for both of us, the call. We are to serve one another. The extent to which Christ loved was not just saying the words, "I love you." That's easy. He laid down his life for his bride. We are to lay down our life for each other. That's not only what the husband has to do, of course, that's also what the wife has to do. Leaving and cleaving and weaving is that I am no more having an agenda, myself for myself, but the agenda in my life is to fulfill the woman or the man that God has united me to. That is God's purpose of marriage.

"I will create you an help meet for you." Not only is my wife my help meet, I am her help meet as well. Yeah? Because not only am I to leave my father and mother, she also is to leave her father and mother. So do not think when you read in Genesis 2 that, "I will make him an help meet," that it doesn't mean that the man is not to be a help meet to her. Of course he is because help meet means that God designs someone on your side that would fill in the blanks that are in you, and the same that you fill in the blanks that are in her.

Now you have the word "help meet." It's the word complementing one another. Now you have the idea of masculinity and femininity for masculinity is one set of characteristics, femininity is the other set of characteristics and they need to be merged together. That's the beauty of God's design.

So since our fall in paradise, Genesis 3, you all know that marriage is not just a romantic journey but even before the fall it was never meant to be a romantic journey only, but it is

worse now after we have fallen. Marriage is beautiful but marriage is hard. It's exhausting. It's taxing. It's challenging. Isn't it? You look all bleary-eyed at me but I like the statement that someone made, he says, "Marriage is a burning joy and strength yet it's also blood, sweat and tears, humbling defeats and exhausting victories." In our post-fallen world, that's what it is, it's just not, "And they happily lived ever after that together." We all know that as we sit here. Yeah, this is a stress. Marriage is never a fairytale come true. One young man married for a while said, "I didn't know love is so hard."

Now if you don't understand that statement, then you've probably never loved because love is not a feeling, is it? Love is to act contrary to your feelings, contrary to what you feel like and what your body is asking and perhaps your body is screaming for because you're so tired and just want to lay down now; love is to deny those feelings at that moment and to serve the person that you have been given by God to serve. So we need to put our own agenda on the backburner sometimes and pour ourselves out. Now that's hard. Totally hard. Well, that's love.

So again, if we want to have a good definition of what love is, then have a long and a deep view at the cross of Jesus. How far am I as a husband and how far are you as a wife willing to go to show that love? Now Christ went against his feelings. What were his feelings? "O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." So there are times in our marriage life that we are having a hard cup to swallow or to drink, but love goes beyond that.

Now, thirdly, and you know that already and that's also painful: marriage is God's school of refining you. We all come into marriage totally unfinished. Now when you think back about that statement for a moment, we are totally unfinished, yeah. As we move out of our childhood into adulthood, mom and dad have done a heroic job or a poor job working with us over these years. If you had a wonderful couple of parents that have guided and challenged and surrounded you and fed you and nourished your tanks of emotions and given you all the toolbox, excellent. Even then you are unfinished. But if you've come out of a dysfunctional family, then you'll totally unfinished and then God places you in a marriage relationship. You see, and this is one of the purposes why I do premarital counseling of these couples because as I look at them and we explore some of their own growing years, I begin to say, "Look, you guys are going to have give some real good attention to the subject because I can foresee that here you're going to really rub each other the wrong way, or this is going to be where the challenge is going to come in because you just don't have those toolboxes naturally with you." Yeah?

So again, friends, think about marriage is your school by which God is refining you, he is using it like a whetstone to polish you, to shave off the rough edges, to carve in different character issues, to work on your personality and to help you to grow up from being a little boy to a big man or a little girl to a big woman. And we all go through that because really marriage is not even a marriage of two people, is it? Really a marriage is a marriage of four people who it's this big man here and the little man inside of me, and there's this big woman and the little girl inside of her. And you know, when a little girl and a little boy comes out, we've got some problems, and how many of your marriage

problems, if you have any of those, is the little boy coming out, the little girl coming out? And now we've got problems because, I mean, the little boy could be spoiled, the little girl could be needy, the little girl could be mouthy, the little boy could be too compliant. Whatever it is, that's how you've been formed and as these two begin to rule in marriage life, we've got big problems.

Now why does God place this husband and wife next to each other? Because he has placed them next to you to shape you a little bit more. Now you say, "Yeah, you shouldn't have said that, pastor, because my wife already is on this journey to make me a better person, and my husband is already on a journey to try to make me a better woman." Yeah, exactly. You've got it right. That's why God placed you together with him or her and it's actually quite beautiful because in a good marriage, we are to so challenge each other that we grow up into the potential person that God really wants us to become and that's how it works, that's painful, that's a struggle sometimes, a huge struggle, but that's what he's going to do.

How many of us couples have fallen in bed at night after a long hard day of trying to understand each other and sighing, "I just don't get it. Those women," that's what I would say, "you need a directory from here to the end of this building to understand how they think." Well, it's not quite that big, right? But ladies, probably the same thing, "Oh, these guys. I just don't get how they think and why they act like this and why they don't see this the way I see it."

Now if that's the case, there's nothing unusual about your marriage, and if you sometimes feel totally frustrated with each other, nothing wrong of your marriage. If you feel sometimes challenged by your husband or by your wife as she's trying to confront you on some weaknesses, remember that's not wrong, this is why God placed you in a marriage life. That was his purpose to refine you. Now if you have a bad attitude towards it, you're fighting against God's purpose not against your wife or your husband because count on it, friends, if God's useful tools of husband and wife is used, your life will become much happier as you grow into the man or the woman that God wants you to be. And that's what I'd like to see. I'd like to see also in the fruit of these talks that your marriage would become so much happier.

I am blessed with a very happy marriage, I don't know about happy wife but I am blessed with a good marriage, and yet every time when I do a topic like this and we read, I read probably one or two books on marriage every year, and I'm always learning new things together with Michelle because you're never done growing and the more you grow together, and I'm sure my wife will say that with me, the more I experience the deep joy and beauty of married life. Yup, I'm still learning, there are still some rough edges on me that you probably don't see but she will tell you if she's allowed to, but she's not, and there are still some rough edges on her too that I won't tell you, but we're still working on those. And will it ever be perfect? No, we will never be perfect because in this world we remain still fallen sinners.

Now lastly, the last purpose of marriage and that's not the last so it is the least, it's actually ultimately the main: marriage is ultimately image-bearing of God and particularly of the relationship of Jesus Christ and his church. You know, when God designed marriage, he already had Christ and his church in mind. That was no afterthought. God already has in his mind church and Jesus and his bride and marriage was designed to reflect that, not afterwards. That's why Paul says this is a great mystery. I'm not talking about marriage, I'm talking about Christ and his church. So everything that the Lord has in mind about marriage is that it may eventually reflect the beauty of Christ's loving, leading head of a wife that is also loving and submitting and following her husband.

Now if I may sum it up tonight: God created marriage to glorify himself and that we may enjoy him forever. Yeah, we are created to glorify him and to enjoy him forever. Now for some reason God designed it and that's a much better possibility in the unity of a marriage life. Perhaps sometimes you think, "I think I could do it much better when I'm alone," and that is not true according to God. It was not good for man to be alone. That was true in a world where there was not sin, it's certainly not true when there is sin. And so we must never think that thought and give in to that. Yeah, the unity of two human beings bonded together in the married state is God's way of glorifying himself but also to glorify him and to enjoy him forever.

Now today we have a me-marriage instead of a we-marriage. Now that's ever since the fall, I don't think it's only today. The problem in the fall instantly is that I begin to focus on myself instead of on the other. So it's a me-marriage. There's a beautiful quote I put on your outline today I thought was worth writing out for you. I think you want to read it and discuss it. "Destructive to marriage is the self-fulfillment ethic that assumes marriage and family are primarily institutions of personal fulfillment necessary for us to become happy and whole, however, this definition fails to appreciate the fact that we always marry the wrong person." Strange statement, eh? We never marry or we never know whom we marry, we just think we do. Or even if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change for marriage means we are not the same person after we have entered it and the primary challenge is learning how to love and care for the stranger to whom you find yourself married. That's an interesting statement.

Now you ask any young couple that question, "Now you're thinking you are strangers to each other?" "Oh, no. No, we really know each other." Now, of course, I laugh at them and I say, "Talk to you again in 10 years and see if you still meant that." You know, we all know we begin to discover things about the other person in married life that we never knew was in that person. Why I said? Because when we're dating, we're all pretenders, we're all a little bit hypocritical. We listen for hours to the women when we're dating and, boy, we're so interested in what they say and we just sit and talk and we can give them hours of time, right? And then marriage and then slowly on these hours become less and less and now we have hardly time to listen to these long stories, yeah? I recognize that, okay, you recognize that too. Well, you discover habits in people that we never knew were there, yeah?

So again, friends, this is not abnormal but that's why God has placed you together. How interesting but also how demanding is the fact that you can't know who your spouse actually will be in the future until you get there. Now all of this would be a lot easier if all of us would know by personal grace the love and power of God in our life. Now when that aspect is missing and we do not have the grace of God in our heart, we don't have a personal faith and knowledge of Christ, we obviously also miss the ultimate power to be the husband and the wife we need to be because now we're on our own and we can't do it on our own, and so ultimately, friends, it's only possible to live the married life in its beauty and its glory when there is a personal relationship between Christ and us, and if our hearts are filled with the love of God, then we can handle a spouse who fails to love us as he or she should love us. However, now add this to it, that does not mean that you just have to endure and put up with it and just let it be and bury yourself into issues in relationship that are not good. No, that's not what Christ is asking us here but the only way we can truly endure in a marriage journey is when we would have the grace of God living in us.

Now the next time that I will speak to you, it is really helpful to know what the many differences between masculinity and femininity. If you know more of those differences and I would like to focus on them in my next talk a little bit more on what are the differences and why are we often not connecting and why often could there be some friction in the marriage relationship, is a lot to do with the fact we're ignorant about the uniqueness of how God created us and if I don't feed into those uniquenesses as a husband or my wife into me, the electricity doesn't go anywhere except causing shock-waves and that's not very comforting. So that's our next topic.

We'll leave for now. We'll have a little break, get something to drink and eat, and in 10 minutes then I will conclude, and if there's no questions tonight, then indeed it will be only for that, we'll just conclude. So let's go have a little drink together.

Good, guys. We're back here again together so those of you listening at home, we have perhaps a few questions. Just before I forget, you notice there is some home construction, I didn't want to call it homework because that has a negative sound, but home construction and the joy, how did I say that again, that's a Shakespearean statement, what was it again? The joy of doing, no, the soul of joy lies in the doing. Yeah, your most profitable feedback or growing up of this, growing out of this discussion is when you actually do the home construction assignments together and that's where you need to make your priority.

Just looking at the three purposes tonight mainly the promotion of the companionship, fulfilling each other's needs, and personal growth, I didn't say a whole lot about that statement but in the refining process, I think it's beautiful if you think about how can my mate, my spouse, how can I be used to make him or her personally grow into the person that she's meant to be? Or, you know, when we men grew up and we asked our mother and father's, you know, "What's the kind of woman I should look for, mom and dad?"

And they'll tell you, "Well, go to Proverbs 31 and that's the one you need to look for." Well, you read that chapter of Proverbs 31 and you think, "Wow, really? I'm gonna have a wife who's going to buy, just go out and buy some land on their own and come back home and say, 'Yeah, I just bought a couple of acres of land today.'" That's not the kind of a woman that you probably want to have, by the way, right? Secondly, where would you find a woman like that who's so capable as that woman? Well, the point is nobody finds a woman like that. They're not to be found, they're to be made. Yeah, she is the product of the husband's loving interaction, leadership, growing her into the potential woman that God wanted her to be, and I haven't quite reached that state yet but I love Michelle to go buy a car on her own, right, let alone land? But you see, the point is that obviously we need to do all we can to grow our spouse in the areas where they need growth and that's a beautiful mindset. So evaluate that.

Now the second question, there are about six issues listed there about marriage life, these six aspects and, please, you know, take time to evaluate your own adaptability, flexibility, your empathy, your will to do work through problems, and be honest with each other. You say, "Hey, this is a zero, or this is an 8." Well, then you have some indication. Jump to the last one, communication is such an important one. You know, we perhaps communicate on level 1 and 2 but are we communicating on number 3, 4 and certainly on level 5, and this is where so many marriages become so stale and so shallow.

That's all. That's your home construction for the next time. Are there any questions tonight? I'll repeat them in the microphone so people can actually hear them unless, better check on my phone here. Okay, no questions here but anybody have any question or any comments to share on this evening?

"I guess it's kind of a question/slash comment. We have pretty boring conversations around the dinner table [unintelligible]."

Okay, so the question was we have very boring conversations at our dinner table. How can we spruce up the conversations?

Now it probably depends a little bit on the age of your kids, James. But it is true that dinner table times are extremely important, so those of you who have any ideas to share on that before I open my mouth? Jane, you have some thoughts?

"I try to learn something new every day and bring something to the table."

Good, so you actually come prepared to the table with something new.

"Yeah, we just, you know, learn something new so you can share something."

Yeah, what a good mindset. So every day you come with something new to the table to share with someone. Now, of course, if you have younger kids, that's not possible yet but...

"So often I forget when we're all sitting there so I'll just write them down, when I'm alone I'll write things down that we need to discuss [unintelligible]."

Yeah, so you write down things throughout the day that say we need to discuss so your family table becomes a conference table, your dinner table, and also things that you need to iron out or need to be, what, corrected, right?

"Whatever, opinions given."

Okay, and that's a really nice method because then your weekly or your daily meeting becomes a family time.

"Everybody knows about it [unintelligible]."

Yup, very nice. Any other thoughts? Yeah. And statistically family times and meaningful time around the dinner table are extremely important for teenagers. Again, we are used to having our dinners every day together but that's a rarity in many families. You wouldn't know how many families never eat together. Thanksgiving and Christmas day maybe, the rest they sit around on the couch looking at a television or so, having a little bit to eat. So statistically if you have a daily time in which your family shares together, it's one way to avoid teenage delinquency. That big number that we just heard tonight, a lot to do with this family time.

So, James, keep plowing on it. If your family has nothing interesting to talk about, come up with a subject.

"[unintelligible]"

Yeah, I mean, our family tables have been the most intriguing discussion tables, sharpening each other's ideas about all kinds of things in life and they still are, it's getting a little harder when they get a little less kids, but it's a joyful time.

Yeah, Michelle?

"I'm also remembering that we were given a game like just a deck of cards.."

I was going to take it along next time.

"Oh, okay. A deck of cards has been suggested [unintelligible], I don't know, just [unintelligible]. If you had a dream vacation, where would you go, or something like that. [unintelligible]."

And of course, I think it's good to use family time to keep your children up-to-date on the world news. This is always a very nice way of just helping them to connect with the things that are happening in the world and that provides all kinds of biblical teaching moments, you know? There's a war there. There's a problem there. School shooting. And

that brings you back to prayer, brings you back to Bible reading. So that's always important and some families will have a world map in their dining room area so you right away can teach your kids geography. You know what, we're talking about this country, they have no clue where it is. Well, there it is. Just learning at the same time and discussing.

Vicky?

"When you talk about discussing what is happening in the world and how indepth do you get with your children when you're discussing that?"

As indepth as they can handle, and as indepth as their questions are. Yeah, but you know, kids will ask questions and when they ask the question, you answer it according to what they ask. That's what you kind of gauge it by.

"So be completely and truthfully honest or...."

Yup.

"...[unintelligible] that this may give them nightmares."

No, if they already asked a question about them, they won't have nightmares about it. Of course, it depends how detailed your answers are going to be. Like if they ask a question about the school shooting, yeah, the details don't have to be said but the idea that somebody came in to shoot, so what would you do next time if that were to happen in your school? Well, we talk about that safety strategy. I mean, kids are not getting nightmares of that. I mean....

"[unintelligible]"

Yeah, good point, I mean, sometimes, sometimes uncertainty creates more fear than facts, you know, and grief, for example, when someone is very seriously ill, we try to hide from the children the facts. That creates more fear and nightmares than having the bare facts out there. Mom is sick or dad is sick, this is going to, that is what we can expect, and that's what I learned, for example, with my children when my wife was sick. No hiding the facts and they didn't have fears that way.

Good question, James.

"You hit on something early on that kind of resonates with me that I see a lot, we're kind of a product of our past, okay? We talked about this generational mindsets that can be passed down and cause great problems. When I see that and talk to people about it or whatever, it seems like it's ingrained so hard in them that, you know, it just seems like it's all so impossible to change. When better knowledge comes to light, how much success can a person expect from a situation where, you know, the mindset or the personality product in the past is a real problem?"

Okay, well, let me repeat the question, it's when you see the issues from the past and people are obviously very dysfunctional in some areas, what they've inherited, you're asking what is, is there any hope in situations like that or do we just have to accept it as it is? My answer is actually not. You know, when you realize in your marriage life you have conflict areas between you and your spouse or you and your kids because of the empty toolbox you have, let me just use that imagery, you've come into the marriage and you have an empty toolbox because your parents or your family situation or your trauma or whatever, has failed to give you the skills, those skills can be relearned if there is a willingness to learn. Yeah, I am convinced that if we're willing to face on the problems and say, "Look, I have the problem, what can I do about this," oodles of books written there, there are discussion guides to help you think and rethink.

"You're talking about lack of a skill but I'm talking, I'm thinking more along the lines of maybe a bad trait, a personality trait that has been..."

Like let's take anger, right? It's a bad trait and people say, "I can't control my anger." That's a big lie. They choose when to let their anger come out. That's a choice we make because they never yell at their boss, they'd rather yell at their wife. They never yell at their coworker the way they yell at their kids. So, you know, we can say, "Yeah, that's a habit. My dad was angry and that's how I am and, you know, I can't help it." That is not true. That's a bad habit but if you say, you know, "Wife or husband, I am joined with you and you know I have this bad habit, help me." If there's a willingness and then you work together with your spouse and you come up with strategies and ways to confront that or to deal with that, that's something very very helpful.

I tend to have a loud voice, louder than I myself realize. Years ago my older daughter said to me, "Dad, why are you always sounding angry?" I said, "Me, angry? Do I sound angry?" Well, I probably have a bit of a preacher voice at home too, I suppose. So but now, you know, one of my youngest kids is very sensitive to noise and Michelle pointed out to me today again, said, "You know, you just have to be aware of that. He is sensitive to noise." So even if you're having a total normal conversation at your normal level of your voice, it for him is too loud and he reacts by pulling back. So obviously I still need to work on this decibel decreasing, even though it's a normal voice to me, it's not at all in the context of being angry, but it's perceived that way. Now can I not change it? Am I going to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I can't change it. It's my voice and I'm born with that." That's baloney. That can be changed. I just need to become aware of it.

So I think there's a lot of habits that we have learned but how long for a habit to make it, to become a habit? Forty days. Strangely there are biological, neurological pathways established at 40 days.

"[unintelligible]."

Same thing.

"What if it wasn't 40 days, what if it was 40 years that [unintelligible]?"

If there's no willingness, there obviously will not be anything happening but, you know, it's not so simplistic but clearly it is to endure and is the continuation, the hanging in there and so on, and being willing to be corrected by your spouse. That's also very important and if you don't accept that, yeah, then it's hard.

You want to share your question yet, Jane, or not? The one you asked out there?

"Oh yeah. So I had a situation where my husband made a decision and I wasn't happy with it and I knew he had the headship ability to make that decision and, you know, really I didn't want to and he did and so to break the tie, more or less, he had to make a decision and so I just, I wanted to be able to say, 'Okay, honey, yes, dear,' but in my heart I guess I really didn't feel like I agreed with that. So I had a really hard time saying that and so I guess I was wondering if there, if it was sinful to not be able to say that wholeheartedly but so, but that was right to say that even though I couldn't say it with my whole heart, right? I mean, I guess that's my question."

I appreciate your honesty and I'll repeat the question again. You know, if a husband and you are having a decision to make and the husband says A, you say B as spouse, obviously eventually a decision needs to be made so the husband makes the decision, headship, you need to submit, but as a spouse you feel really you can't wholeheartedly with all your desire agree with it, so what is now my place? Well, let's read the Scriptures on this as clearly submitting yourself one another in the fear of the Lord in Ephesians 5:21, "Wives, submit yourself unto your husband and to your own husband as unto the Lord." Now that word "submit" there is the military word for placing yourself in the rank underneath. So listen now to the military sector, the captain makes a decision, "Okay, we're going to charge," and the soldiers are saying, "Captain, I don't think it's the right decision." The captain says, "We are going to charge." What do the soldiers do? Now if they go wholeheartedly or halfheartedly, if they do it halfheartedly they're going to really lose it, maybe their own life as well. Yeah? They are having to obey at that moment the captain. He has made a decision and it's not going to work if they don't.

So God is using the same analogy, "Wives, submit yourself unto your own husband." When there is a decision to be made and you cannot come to a decision and it needs to be made, indeed your calling is to submit and then to also support it and to make the best of it. Now having said that, however, I don't think it is very wise that a husband and a wife make decisions in the way that the one needs to take a decision, the other needs to follow it. If it's possible that you can delay the decision, delay it. You know, it rarely has happened and I think in my life that I made a decision where my wife said, "No, not the right one." If that's the case, I feel then maybe I need to step back and ask myself, "Lord, are we doing the right thing here? Let's wait before we move on." Then maybe occasionally moments that you really as a husband make the decision, but if you feel that your wife is not in agreement with it or sees all kinds of good reasons why that is not a right decision, you'd be unwise to go forward as a husband. Yeah, and it is a sin issue but

that is exactly the struggle, isn't it, that you, "Do I have to do it wholeheartedly?" I say yes. Yeah, then.

"So taking that whole scenario in context, imagine that the husband [unintelligible]."

Right. Of course, ungodly, if it's sinful, right? That's clear, we don't have to speak about that. If there's a sinful decision, the wife can say, "No, I need to be obedient more to God than to you." So then she can say no. If a decision is ungodly, [unintelligible] decision, yeah, it was ungodly, that's a good scenario, really. I mean, did she do right or wrong when she went out to appease David with the food items.

"[unintelligible]"

Really, that was a very wise decision. She didn't, I mean, she avoided the bloodshed here but I cannot say that that was wrong. That was a very good decision.

"[unintelligible]"

Yeah. She really was protecting her husband as well. So Abigail's situation is a good solution but it goes back to, you know, the situation. If we can avoid having to go separate ways, you know, be together on this. The common scenario, the husband is the head and the wife is the neck, you don't turn your head without your neck. That's how close we are to be related and that makes it wise.

Good. Good questions. So we leave it with this unless there's any more that's coming in.

"Well, I guess, I just have a little comment. I think often [unintelligible], kids when they're younger and so forth, [unintelligible] marriage and relationship is based on feelings [unintelligible], but there's so much about marriage that's basically the 1+1=2, it's just the simple effort even if there's not quite the emotional [unintelligible]. This actually goes back to my question a little bit and I already kind of knew the answer. For instance, I know that [unintelligible], it stirs up more conversation. The simple fact that I know that even though I might not really feel like it, once we do it afterwards we say [unintelligible] and that conversation is [unintelligible]. I know there's a lot of things done just because we do it [unintelligible]."

And really what you're describing, James, and it's too hard to repeat this whole conversation in a few words, but you're showing leadership. You know, you want to move into the right direction and as a husband you take the leadership, you think of ways to move it into a right direction, and that's awesome, that's beautiful, even if it's a conversation at the dinner table, I mean, and that's what leadership is all about so that you lead so others would follow if it's a conversation or it's a deepening of your communication, suggestions to read a book or whatever you do together.

"[unintelligible]"

Pardon? It is, totally building connections and out of that flows so many other benefits.
Yeah, Jane?

"[unintelligible]"

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, well, that would be the new, that would be another subject, you know, what's the role of the woman, what's the role of the husband. So, yeah, she has a very important position as well as to uphold the headship or the husband within the family.

Great. Well, sounds like we've had another good discussion here. Let's close with singing one more psalter and let's do psalter 60, "To Thee I lift my soul," verses 1 and 2, let's do 1 and 3. "To Thee I lift my soul, In Thee my trust repose." And then verse 3, "Show me Thy paths, O Lord, Teach me Thy perfect way." And that's also to do really with marriage life, isn't it?

"To Thee I lift my soul,
In Thee my trust repose;
My God, O put me not to shame
Before triumphant foes.

Show me Thy paths, O Lord,
Teach me Thy perfect way,
O guide me in Thy truth divine,
And lead me day by day."

So let's close with prayer.

Gracious God, we give thee thanks again tonight for having refreshed our minds and challenged us in our rethinking about the purposes of marriage, why thou hast placed us together as sinners, Lord, in this closest of all relationships among humans we will ever experience. And we all know more or less already what a challenging school marriage life is and, Lord, make us all willing to learn, willing to unlearn, and also able to learn as well as able to unlearn so that we may grow in the potential man or woman, husband or wife, that thou desires us to be, and that in our relationship we may truly reflect the beauty of Christ and his church. And Lord, and thou knows how many sins indeed cleave to all our marriage life and be pleased to use also these simple means to sanctify our marriages by thy personal presence in our heart and thy personal presence in our homes that we may also give our children that thou hast given us, and some of them are still in the very beginning of their journey with their children, Lord, at best starting of their young lives as they grow into adulthood. Guide us on our way home tonight and we ask this all in the pardoning of our sins in Jesus' name. Amen.

"[unintelligible]"

Yeah, who knows, I might. No questions so far, just grateful. Thank you. Well, thank you all for coming.