



Why Marriage is Hard

The following excerpts are taken from part 5 of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full message is available on FoodForYourSoul.net

The Ideal Marriage

You select your absolute favorite person in the entire world and marry that person, and you cannot get along. Why is that? You get along just fine with people you don't love nearly as much as your spouse. More marriages break up than any other kind of friendships. Why is there so much conflict in marriage?

He will rule over you

The answer is in Genesis 3. Marriage was damaged by the fall and the curse. And so the solution to marital problems is to reverse the effects of the curse. Just as you fix a car by restoring it to manufacturer specs, you restore a marriage by returning to the pre-fall ideal God created in Genesis 2.

Everything God created was good. But man chose sin and death, and a lot of things were included in the package of death, including susceptibility to sin, estrangement from God, sickness, pain, sorrow, suffering, decay, death, and – the distortion of marriage. God's response could have been to just let man die and be done with it, but instead He set a plan of redemption in place that would reverse man's plunge into rebellion & death. This plan cost Him His own Son.

Fig leaves - Loss of intimacy & unity

The account of the ideal in Genesis 2 ended with the words, "The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." Notice the very first thing that happens when they sin.

Gn.3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

So much for naked and unashamed. Now they want to cover themselves up. Naked and unashamed meant they were completely comfortable and felt safe with each other. There was no fear of the spouse having any negative judgment, which enabled them to be completely open with each other. But after they sinned they wanted to cover themselves because now there

was some danger of being hurt. They had to take up a defensive posture and that is a posture that destroys intimacy.

Danger is always the killer of intimacy, because it destroys trust. You cannot be in a loving posture and a defensive posture at the same time. The more you focus on guarding yourself the less your focus is on loving your spouse. If expressing feelings is dangerous – possibly resulting in being mocked or ridiculed or gossiped about, getting shot down, obviously there will be reluctance to be open. Instead there will

be a façade, which means you are not even interacting with the real person. The more danger there is, and the less trust there can be and the more the relationship will have to stay at the surface level.

Loss of intimacy with God

Why is there a sudden loss of intimacy between husband and wife after the fall? The answer is in vv.8-10. For the first time in their existence they are now hiding from God and attempting to avoid His presence. Their sin destroyed their intimacy with God.

The only way to have Genesis 2 marriage is by grace. But if you are not close to God you forfeit that grace, and you will not be able to be close to your spouse. Ninety-nine percent of solving the problems in our marriages is simply walking more closely with the Lord. The more you and your spouse approach closer to God the closer you will come to each other. The more intimacy you have with God the more anger and unforgiveness and selfishness toward each other will be replaced with kindness, gentleness, patience, joy and love.

Blame shifting

It is no surprise, then, the very first words out of Adam's mouth after he sins and then hides from God are selfish, unloving words. God comes and demands an accounting from him, and he immediately just throws Eve under the bus to try to save face. ("**The woman you put here with me-- she gave me some fruit...**" – v.12)

Blame-shifting is the natural response of the unrepentant heart when sin is pointed out. "Why did you do that?" "Well, you have to understand, she did this, and they did that and nobody helped me and everybody sinned against me..." The flesh is like a wild animal. When it gets cornered, look out – because it will go on the attack.

So Adam does not hesitate one second to point to Eve's guilt. You do not do that to someone you love. You cover over their faults and sins if at all possible. If you are late because your wife could not get ready in time then when you arrive you say, "I'm sorry we're late. We had trouble getting ready." Love takes such delight in the other person, and so strongly desires to protect that person, that it will gladly take scorn upon itself to protect the beloved. But selfishness will throw the other person under the bus in a heartbeat to save face.

The Curse on Roles - loss of intimacy & partnership

On top of the fall came the curse. God's curse touched the roles in the marriage (childbearing for her and providing for the family for him) as well as on the marriage relationship itself (**your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you** - v.16).

The most obvious role that is unique to the woman is childbearing. And in the curse God increases difficulty in that area. And if that role was effected no doubt the rest of the women's unique roles were similarly effected. Every mother will testify that while childbearing is hard, child rearing is no picnic either. Nor is homemaking, submission to the husband's headship, respect for her husband, or any other female role.

The same is true for the man. The curse on the role of the man is 10 words in the Hebrew. The curse on the role of the man is 45 words. God demanded an accounting from the man first and God lets loose with the most extensive curse on the man, because it is the man who bears primary responsibility in the marriage. His role of being the provider for the family is cursed. Going to work every day, and bearing the relentless responsibility of providing for the family - that is a very heavy load. The bills just never let up – if you lose your job or get sick or get injured or need a break – it doesn't matter; the bills just keep coming. And it's not just farming that is difficult – it's the whole of the man's role as head of the home. Every part of masculinity in marriage is touched by the curse.

What is the result of the roles becoming more difficult? Think about why God created the masculine and feminine roles in the first place. It was because Adam needed a suitable helper to rescue him from the peril of having a task that was beyond his ability to accomplish alone. And in order to be a suitable helper she had to be female. The reason for the male and female roles was partnership. So, if that part of God's ideal for marriage (partnership) is accomplished by the man fulfilling his role as male and the woman fulfilling her role as female, what do you suppose happens when the male role becomes much more difficult for him and the female role becomes much more difficult for her? It destroys that Genesis 2 partnership.

When they put on fig leaves it ruined the *intimacy* and oneness, and when they were cursed with respect to their roles it ruined the *partnership*.

The Curse on the Marriage Relationship - Loss of priority

Genesis 3:16 ...Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

The word translated **desire** means to desire to control, dominate or conquer. The only other time that word is used is in the next chapter.

Genesis 4:7 sin is crouching at your door; it desires you, but you must master it.

The desire that come with the curse is the same kind of desire with which sin desires to control and overcome its victim. The first part of the curse on the marriage relationship itself is a tendency for the woman to want to be in control of her husband.

It's so tempting for a woman to think, "If this family were just run my way everything would be a whole lot better." No matter what the problem is, the solution is always your husband doing what you think he should do to fix it. And women have a lot of methods for gaining control over their husbands. The way to dominate someone is to use your power to coerce them into doing what you want. The fact that you live with your husband gives you a huge amount of power, because you have the power to make every waking moment of your husband's life miserable. And all women are tempted to use that power in subtle ways to manipulate their husbands.

There are many women who hide behind a façade of submission who are as rebellious as can be. They think they are submissive because they never do the opposite of what their husband decides. But that is because they manipulate their husbands into deciding what they want. The husband knows that if he does anything but what she wants in this particular decision there is going to be a steep price to pay. She is going to be in a bad mood, or she will cry or mope or be irritable or whatever. Either that or she just badgers and badgers until he finally thinks, "Fine – I don't care what the wise course is, I'm just going to do what she wants to get her off my back." So she has all these ways of pressuring him into doing what she thinks is best, and then she convinces herself that she is submissive because she follows along when he does what she pressured him to do.

Genesis 3:16 ...Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

The word translated rule is another very negative term. It is not talking about male leadership or headship. It is a word that refers to harsh, despotic, heavy-handed, suppressing, dominating selfish subjugation.

There is an old country song that says, "A woman's place in this ol' world is under some man's thumb." And that is really about how it has been for most women throughout history. The woman tries to dominate her husband through the powers she has, but very often the bottom line is the husband has the brute strength advantage, and so he can force his way. And so the history of mankind has been a history of horrible treatment of women at the hands of men.

Jesus radically overturned the cultural norms with regard to women, and showed women equal honor as men. And that ideal was taught by Paul and the other Apostles so that now, wherever Christianity has had a significant influence, women are treated with much greater respect than in the rest of the world. The Koran teaches that men should beat

their wives. Hinduism gave us bride burning, which still happens to thousands of women every year. Many elderly women in China are crippled because of foot binding (not to mention the forced abortions).

The norm throughout human history has been for women to be forced into subservience to men, and to be used and then cast aside. Even in many Christian homes there is shameful abuse of women. Many men in the Church think that headship means despotism and submission means subservience. They think being head of the home means they get their way whenever there is a disagreement. And so you get husbands who order their wife around the house like a domestic slave. Men like that have no understanding of servant leadership. Jesus taught that all things being equal, when some kind of serving needs to be done it is the role of the one in authority to do it more than anyone else. If you are the highest authority then you are the greatest servant. But in the world it is the other way around – those in authority use their authority to get others to serve them. So in the world the ones under authority open doors and make coffee for the one in authority. But in the kingdom of God the one in authority washes the feet of those under him.

Priority of self

The effect of the curse on the marriage relationship, then, is that both the man and the woman try to control the other for their own ends. In a word – selfishness. No doubt the biggest problem not only in all marriages but in all relationships is selfishness - being self-focused rather than God-focused and other-focused. When Adam and Eve started being concerned about protecting themselves, their focus switched from their spouse to themselves. When you are loving someone your attention is on them. When you are selfish your attention is on you.

God's ideal for marriage is for your spouse to be your highest priority (**for this reason a man will leave his father and mother...**). But when selfishness dominates, self is the highest priority. And when you place yourself above your spouse as the main priority, that destroys the whole marriage. The covenant loyalty of marriage is the foundation of everything. Remove that, and the whole superstructure collapses.

Selfishness ruins *companionship* (a self-absorbed person is a terrible companion). It ruins *partnership* because a selfish person is concerned with his own agenda, not helping you. It ruins *oneness and unity* because the more you try to dominate and control the other person the more that person has to protect himself or herself from you. It ruins *intimacy* because you cannot be naked and unashamed with a selfish person. That person's #1 priority is their own interests, not yours, and so if protecting their interests and desires means hurting you, then they will not hesitate to hurt you.

And on top of all that, the trust is sapped out of the marriage, because you can no longer count on your spouse to be committed to you.

He will be committed to you as long as it seems to serve his interests, but when it doesn't he will bail. And so that confidence that nothing can destroy this relationship is gone. And when that confidence is gone it short-circuits everything else in the marriage. Instead of loving him you find yourself just trying to manipulate him into staying committed to you. And doing that makes you harder to love, which makes the whole situation even more tenuous.

By far the hardest thing in marriage counseling is reversing selfishness. The wife comes in caring about nothing but her husband changing. And the husband cares about nothing but his wife changing. How she can be a better wife is the farthest thing from her mind. And how he can be a better husband is the farthest thing from his mind. And you tell him the things he needs to do and it goes in one ear and out the other, but she is taking detailed notes. Then you tell her what she needs to do and her eyes glaze over and he sits in rapt attention. That is selfishness, and it is next to impossible to overturn.

Selfishness is miserable

And when you fall into this - when your focus switches to yourself – it is an absolute guaranteed ticket to a miserable life. Do you know any joyful, selfish people? There is no such animal. Have you ever met a selfish person who has a happy marriage? It does not happen. Most of the time the most miserable, unhappy people around are the ones that are the most selfish.

A selfish person says, "I need my spouse to love me properly so I can be happy. I need my spouse to stop doing things that hurt me, and start doing things I want, or I can't be happy." And they do the same thing in all their relationships. If you are one of those people, you are probably forever getting upset by your friends because they are always failing to love you properly. People like this often cannot get settled in a church because no one there loves them the right way. When your focus is on how well people are loving you, you will be guaranteed to always be miserable.

Love is delightful

As we found in brochure #3, Joy comes from loving more than from being loved. In Jn.15:11 Jesus told us the secret to joy.

John 15:11 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

What is the command that will bring complete joy?

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

The greatest happiness comes not by being loved but by loving people in the way Christ commanded. Your marriage will not improve, and your happiness will not increase if your spouse changes and starts doing all the things you wish he or she would do. What Jesus said will make you happy is if you love your spouse.

But the world and your own flesh tell you the opposite. They tell you that your energy is best spent trying to get your spouse to love you better. And the tragic thing is most Christian books on marriage feed right into that. It's always some variation of this same theme: "Men, show tenderness to your wife and she will give you the respect you crave." Or "Women, give your husband the honor and respect he wants and he will show you the tenderness and affection you desire." The philosophy behind that advice is that the best way to get your spouse to give you what you want is to give them what they want. That is not love. It is a selfish, self-focused manipulation technique. You do not show your wife affection in order to manipulate her into giving you what you want. That is not love. Love is when you show your wife affection because that affection expresses something inside you that you cannot wait to express.

Increased need, decreased help

If Adam needed Eve back in Genesis 2, how much more is he in need after the curse? Their needs for each other are far greater now than they were before, yet instead of ramping up their help, they both become selfish and try to dominate and control each other. That is what happened to marriage. Marriage is hard because of the effects of the curse.

Why the curse?

We speak of living in a sin-cursed world, but the reality of Genesis 3 is that the curse came not from sin but from God. It was God who cursed His creation. Why did He do that? Especially marriage. Doesn't He want us to have good marriages? Doesn't God desire that we have ideal companionship, partnership, oneness, and intimacy and that we make our spouse our highest priority? If He wants all that, why make it hard for us by cursing marriage?

The curse was the consequence of sin. Think for a moment about why Adam and Eve's marriage in Genesis 2 was so good. What was the cause of all that wonderful intimacy, oneness, companionship, partnership, and priority? Were Adam and Eve the source of all that goodness? No. It all came from God. It was grace from God that produced all that. And there is a very important principle about grace in Jonah 2:8 - **Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.** When you prefer some earthly treasure above God you forfeit grace that you otherwise could have had. You absolutely cannot have it both ways. Coming to God is like getting married. A woman who wants to get married has to be willing to give up all her other boyfriends. And a person who wants intimacy with God cannot be committing adultery with this world. And so when mankind decided to rebel against God we forfeited the grace of Genesis 2.

The curse was necessitated by sin. It would have been an evil thing for God to continue to dispense the same grace even while man was rebelling in sin. If your spouse comes to you and asks for money to pay for a hotel for the purpose of adultery, it would be wrong for you to supply that money. And it would be wrong for God to supply us with grace as a reward