

Marriage: The Tie That Frees • Part 5

Challenges To Intimacy • Part 1

I. INTRODUCTION - GENESIS 2

A. *Living Happily Ever After*

1. A little girl had just heard the story of *Snow White* at school for the first time
 - a. she rushed home and told her mother the whole thing as best as she could remember it
 - b. she told her how Prince Charming had arrived on his white horse and kissed the sleeping Snow White back to life.
 - c. then she asked her mother, "Do you know what happened then?"
 - d. the mother searched her memory and said, "They lived happily ever after?"
 - e. the little girl said, "No, Mommy, they got married!"
2. Getting married and living happily ever after are not necessarily the same thing, as every married person knows
3. A good marriage is hard work
4. But the couple that's willing to invest themselves and do the work will find that it pays off incredible dividends

B. *Intimacy*

1. We began this series by looking at the purpose and goal of marriage
2. Then in each of the last 3 messages, I've begun by recapping that same thing
3. The reason why I've been so careful to start right there, is because unless we are constantly reminded of the *purpose* GOD has given for marriage, we will tend to redefine it by what the world says or what our own desires dictate
4. We need to be constantly reminded of the *goal* GOD directs for our marriages; lest we get off track and start pursuing something less
5. It is only as we understand God's plan and intention for marriage that our marriages can be healthy and fulfilling
6. So, let's recap once more: Genesis 2

{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.

{19} And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

{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.

{21} And the LORD God 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.

{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.

{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.

- a. the *purpose* of marriage is to solve the *problem of loneliness*
- b. the *goal* of marriage is to *become one*
7. This biblical ideal of "oneness" might be better understood as intimacy
 - a. where a husband and wife *know* each other
 - b. it's pictures a mutual sharing of life and living that knows no boundaries
 - c. it's a commitment of love and acceptance that no matter *what is known* about the other person, there is no fear of rejection
 - d. that's why we read that little postscript about the first marriage between Adam and Eve, that they were *naked*, but *not ashamed*
 - e. God intends marriage to be a safe place, the *one* place beside our relationship with Him, where we can be *completely* open and honest without the fear of being cast away
 - f. and understood that way - we see that marriage is a commitment to love and be loved, *just like God does*

C. Challenges To Intimacy

1. All of this is taken up in the idea of *intimacy*
2. And if intimacy is the goal of marriage, by which God intends for a man and woman to find the happiness and satisfaction He desires for them, then we can be sure the devil will seek to hamper and hinder our pursuit of intimacy
3. Today, and next week, we will be looking at some of the *main challenges* to intimacy
4. And I want to warn you that what we're going to look at isn't normal Sunday morning fare
 - a. some of these subjects tend to be avoided in church
 - b. but I don't think we can deal honestly with the subject of marriage *without* talking about these things and seeing what God's word says
 - c. in our reluctance to deal with difficult issues, we give the enemy the opportunity to get a foothold and do damage
 - d. as it says in Hosea 4:6, God's people are destroyed because the priests failed to declare His counsel
 - e. they didn't want to say the hard thing, issue the proper warning
 - f. and as a result, the people passed on to ruin
 - g. I do not want to arrive before my Lord and be guilty of such a thing
 - h. so we will be speaking of issues not *usually* covered in Church
5. There are many challenges to intimacy
 - a. but I've narrowed it down to 4 main hot-spots
 - b. family, money, sex, and conflict
 - c. as we look at these things I may tread on some of toes
 - d. we may end up slaying some sacred cows in terms of confronting long held beliefs
 - e. but in all we look at, ask the Lord to show you what He is saying, not me

6. Today, we're going to look at the subjects of *conflict* and *money*
7. Next week we'll look at *family* and *sex*

II. CONFLICT

A. *The Problem - James 4*

1. John & Mary had just spent a week on their honeymoon
 - a. it was the first day back at home when John took Mary by the hand and said,
 - b. "Now that we're married, dear, I hope you won't mind if I mention a few little *defects* that I've noticed about you."
 - c. Mary replied, "Not at all John, it was those little defects that kept me from getting a better husband."
2. Any couple that seek to live together for the rest of their lives are going to experience the challenge of *conflict*
3. Being the fallen creatures we are, we want our own way
4. To put it bluntly: we're all *generally* a bunch of selfish, self-centered, egotistical brats
5. James puts it this way: {James 4:1}

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

6. When you put *any* two people together and tell them that from that point on, they have to live together for the rest of their lives, deferring to one another, serving one another, being committed to one another, you *know* that it's only a matter of time before there is going to be tension and conflict
 - a. it may be minutes, it may be years - but eventually it will happen
 - b. one will want one thing at the same time that the other wants something else
 - c. and it will result in a show down
 - d. it's resolving that showdown that we want to get a handle on today
7. I've had dozens of couples come to me for pre-marital counseling
 - a. and in our second session we deal with the topic of conflict resolution
 - b. to introduce the subject, I say something like,
 - c. "You know, living together for the rest of your lives means you're going to have face conflict with each other. You're going to fight!"
 - d. I don't know how many have looked at me, holding hands, with this look of complete shock or disbelief
 - e. so I ask, "You mean to tell me you two have never yet disagreed on anything?"
 - f. to which they reply that of course, they've disagreed; they've argued
 - g. but they're in love!!!!!!!!!!!!!! And love overcomes all obstacles!
 - h. what I've discovered after some more digging is that when these couples faced conflict, instead of resolving it, they submerged it and glossed over it with a covering of "love"
 - i. but all us *married* couples knows what happens - that stuff all comes out later!

8. Love does not guarantee an end to conflict
9. And conflict, left unresolved, will drive a wedge between a husband and wife and halt their progress in intimacy
10. So face it - conflict is a natural result of two people living together - it's going to come
11. What we need to do is have a plan for how to resolve conflict when it arises

B. Differences

1. One of the main keys to resolving conflict is to remember that it's going to come
2. Marriage is a process of *becoming* one
 - a. you begin with two
 - b. and by a mutual commitment to love one another, there is a blending that doesn't annihilate the individuals, but fulfills them and makes something new
3. But because there are two - and each has their own brain, own will, own personality; there are going to be points at which they diverge - where they are different
4. Now, a guy and gal are usually attracted to each other *at first* because of their similarities
 - a. they find each other physically attractive because they share the same set of ideas in this regard
 - b. they were both in the same place when they first met probably because they share some common interest that brought them there
 - c. they discover they like the same kind of music and food and art
 - d. they enjoy doing similar activities
5. It's these similarities that make them mutually attractive to one another
6. But a funny thing happens after they reach a certain part of their relationship, usually about a week after their wedding -
7. They discover that there are a whole lot of differences between them too - things they never knew before - or conveniently overlooked
 - a. one is tidy and likes everything in its place - the other, where it falls is good enough
 - b. one is very careful with the record keeping - the other, what's a record?
 - c. one balances the checkbook as soon as the bank statement arrives - the other thinks as long as there's checks in the book, there's money in the account
 - d. one thinks the toilet paper should only come off the roll a certain way;
 - 1) four panels, folded into a triangle
 - 2) the other doesn't even notice how it goes on the roll
 - e. does it really matter if you leave the seat up?
 - f. can't you just squeeze the toothpaste from the middle of the tube?
 - g. no - you roll from the bottom up - and woe to the fool who leaves the cap off!!!
8. We laugh at the discovery that while it's the similarities that attract us to one another at first, it's the opposites that end up with each other!

- a. Mary likes to sleep in while John is an early riser
 - b. Mary loves broccoli, John abhors it
 - c. Mary loves Neil Diamond - John likes Led Zepellin
 - d. Mary likes the beach - John likes the desert
 - e. on and on it goes . . .
9. Now, here's the challenge to intimacy in all this
 - a. with our similarities - there *is* no conflict - we already share these things and are blended in them
 - b. but our *differences* are going to provide us with a vast field of potential conflict
 10. If Mary demands that her desires are met, and John demands at the same time that his are - there is going to be trouble
 11. The commitment of marriage means that Mary and John work to resolve the conflict
 12. And here's the mindset they need to have: Differences are a golden opportunity to BECOME ONE!
 - a. rather than seeing differences as turf to fight over -
 - b. see them as the very stuff of intimacy
 13. Remember, intimacy is a process - it is a *becoming* one
 14. Intimacy isn't deepened in the things we already share and agree on
 15. Intimacy can only grow when we work together to resolve and blend those things that challenge it!
 16. Let me use a personal example
 - a. when Lynn and I married, I was a total nut for snow skiing, and Lynn was a volleyball junkie
 - b. I hated volleyball, and she really did not enjoy skiing at all; probably because I had tried to teach her!
 - c. for the first few years of our marriage, we were at an impasse regarding these activities
 - 1) skiing isn't cheap and involved travel and where we spend our vacation time
 - 2) volleyball meant several nights a month out between games and practices
 - d. because we knew each other did not like the other's leisure activities, neither of us did them - Lynn didn't play VB and I didn't ski
 17. Then Lynn said that she wanted to try skiing again if she could take a real lesson
 18. At about the same time, I agreed to join her in joining a VB team so we could play together
 - a. I stink at sports and was mostly just afraid of looking like a complete geek!
 - b. so we joined a team and began to play
 19. Lynn took a lesson, and found out she really likes skiing
 20. It turns out, after playing a little bit, while I still stink, I like VB
 21. Both of us realized that the other's leisure time pursuits were things that brought real enjoyment
 - a. love desires to see the other blessed and having a good time
 - b. so in love, Lynn reached out to grow and change by learning how to ski

- c. I reached out and became willing to learn to like VB
- 22. Now, we could have dug in our heels and fortified our defenses
 - a. I could have demanded that Lynn let me go skiing
 - b. and she could have demanded that she be allowed to go play VB
- 23. But the resolution to differences in this area all began when each of us laid down our desires and demands and became willing to look at life from the other's perspective
- 24. And as a result, our lives together are richer - Lynn now has a new experience and sport she enjoys as do I - and we both have 2 new activities to share together that allow us to blend our lives into greater intimacy and oneness!
- 25. Every couple has differences -
 - a. the choice is yours on whether you are going to allow them to be the causes of conflict, or blending
 - b. will they be obstacles to intimacy, or opportunities to achieve it
 - c. very simply, the choice is yours!
- 27. What we need to realize is that God uses marriage to make us more like Jesus
 - a. these differences, these *challenges* to intimacy, are ordained by Him to sharpen us and conform us to His image
 - b. Proverbs 27:17 says

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

- c. two swords, struck in *battle*, will nick and notch each other
- d. swung long and hard enough, they will break
- e. but a sword, when put to a file at the right angle, will be sharpened
- 28. Is your marriage a battle - are your swords flying?
- 29. Or is your mate a file the Lord is using to sharpen you and make you a better person?
- 30. Of course, all this demands that a man or woman be *willing to grow and change*
- 31. A man once bought a new radio, brought it home, placed it on the refrigerator, plugged it in, turned it to a country station in Nashville and then pulled all the knobs off!
 - a. he had already tuned in all he ever wanted or expected to hear.
 - b. some couples are in a rut of conflict
 - c. they've dug in their heels and fortified their position
 - d. they've pulled the knobs off and decided that what has been is what will be
 - e. they only change that will come is the change their *mate* makes, not *them*!
- 32. Let me make sure I'm being clear - That isn't marriage!
 - a. marriage is *two* becoming one
 - b. not one becoming the *other*
- 33. Be careful of confusing your preferences with the "right way" of doing things
 - a. where does it say that the TP has to come off the roll one way?
 - b. toothpaste?

C. Resolving Conflict

1. Every husband and wife needs to have an action plan for how they're going to handle those times when communication does break down and selfishness gets

in the way

2. Even the best marriages know difficult times - even the closest couples fight!
3. So - what do we do?
4. The best counsel for this is something we looked at in our last study - Ephesians 4

{26} “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, . . .

{29} Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

{30} And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

{31} Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

{32} And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

5. When angry, think *twice* before you say anything . . .
6. As it says in Proverbs,

In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but the one who restrains his lips is wise [Proverbs 10:19]

7. So, follow James' advice . . . [James 1]

{19} Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

{20} for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

III. MONEY

A. The Problem

1. Another one of the main challenges to intimacy is the challenge of competing *values*
2. Not moral values, not ethics; I'm referring to *priorities* and the *expectations* regarding *money*
3. You see, when we talk about money, we're talking about what a person considers to be of *value*
4. A dollar bill is really just a piece of paper - but it's what that piece of paper is able to *do* that creates problems in many marriages
5. According to recent studies, money problems ran as one of the primary reasons why couples split up
6. The reason for this is because it is rarely discussed *prior* to marriage
 - a. our finances are a private matter
 - b. so a guy and gal will respect each other's privacy in this area and refrain from talking about it before marriage
 - c. but then once they're married, they have to go through the process of blending this very important area of their lives
 - d. and they discover they have widely diverse attitudes toward the acquiring, saving, management, and spending of money
 - e. since there's little in life that doesn't somehow relate to money, this

becomes a big deal and a real challenge to intimacy

B. The Solution

1. So what's the solution - What are a husband and wife to do?
2. This is a piece of cake!
3. They discover what God says about money - and they follow His direction!
4. Rather than the husband demanding his way, or the wife hers - they agree to seek God's counsel and follow that
5. Now, here's what's so exciting about this - God's word is filled with rock solid and very specific instruction about how to handle our finances
6. The basic principle that governs this area is *stewardship*
 - a. everything you have *really* belongs to God
 - b. He's only loaned it to you to see what you will do with it
 - c. if you invest it so that it is used well, He gives more
 - d. if you squander and fritter it away, then you lose
7. Where money can be a great means to deepen intimacy is when a husband and wife realize that not only are they *individually* stewards but together their marriage is stewardship
 - a. as they work together, their marriage is making an investment in the Kingdom of God
 - b. by pooling their resources they can live more efficiently and accomplish more than they could by themselves
 - c. but of course this means they are both agreed in this area of finances
 - d. their priorities are the same - they're going in the same direction in terms of what's important to them
 - e. they've decided where to invest their lives and what the Lord has given them
8. Let me conclude with this:
 - a. we could now launch into *another* 6 week series just looking at the subject of money
 - b. instead of that, let me suggest that if you are unaware of what the bible says about this subject, sign up to take one of the Crown Home groups
 - c. people that have taken it say that not only has it revolutionized their understanding of their finances, it's dramatically changed their entire lives as they learn to see themselves as a steward
 - d. it's even been instrumental in saving thousands of marriages!

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Hard of Hearing

1. A golden anniversary party was thrown for an elderly couple.
2. The husband was moved by the occasion and wanted to tell his wife just how he felt about her.
3. She was quite hard of hearing, however, and often misunderstood what he said.
4. With many family members and friends gathered around, he toasted her: "My dear wife, after fifty years I've found you tried and true!"

5. She shot back, "Well, let me tell you something--after fifty years I'm tired of you, too!"

B. After 50 Years

1. If Jesus should delay His coming, may it be that after 50 years of marriage we aren't tired of each other
2. But that we are still going and growing into deeper and deeper levels of intimacy
3. Next week we'll take a look at the challenge of *Family* and *Sex*