

Prevent Divorce. Nurture Marriage!

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[0:00] We're going old school today. So, we're not sure why. Maybe my magnetic personality, but I'm the only one who causes problems with our headsets.

! How weird is that? So, we're going to go back to a wired microphone. Try that for a change. I want to give an extra plug for the prayer meeting tonight. And I'll tell you why.

For one thing, we need to pray. God's people need to be in his presence. We're his children. He wants us to talk to him about our needs. But one of the things that we're trying to do with this prayer meeting tonight is to certainly focus on the needs of our congregation, our health needs.

We've got a number of families that are going through different types of trials. We want to continue to pray for that. But we also want to focus on what is God doing? How are we involved in what God is doing around the world?

From Dubuque, I like to use Acts 1-8. You know, Jesus sent us out as his disciples to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. Dubuque, Iowa, the United States, the uttermost parts of the earth.

[1:07] Well, we're involved in all of those places. Did you know that? We send money to each of those divisions. And God's at work. God is at work.

And I don't want to steal my thunder from tonight, but we're going to pray about it. And this may come as a shock. Some of you may not even believe this is possible.

But we're not going to have teaching on prayer. I'm not going to talk a lot. That's the part you probably won't believe. We are actually going to pray. So it's an hour.

Love to see if you can't make it. Be praying for us. And continue to pray for our church. Because God moves as people pray. That's the bottom line. So as we turn the corner into Mark 10 today, I want to tell you, so turn your Bibles to Mark 10.

Start there. I apologize. Last week I was short on time. And was unusually, usually I focused just in Mark or one or two other passages. Last week we got a guided tour at blazing speed.

[2:12] I will not do that to you again today. But as we turn the corner to Mark 10, if you think back to early July, the sermon I gave on baptism, and then the sermons that followed that were specifically in Mark, we've really been focused for the last four or five weeks on what was really only probably a two or three week period in Jesus' life with the disciples.

They had gone up to Caesarea Philippi, which is quite a ways north of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was teaching and did some healing there, and then he took the disciples up to the Mount of Transfiguration.

Then they came back down, and then they slowly made their way down along the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, down to Judea, which is to the south, and then over across the Jordan into the wilderness on the east side of the Jordan.

Jesus was very intentional. Time was short. Remember I talked about the fact that Jesus had a sense of urgency because he knew that the cross was coming. And so this was the time when he finally started to tell the disciples, hey guys, I'm going to die.

And they didn't want to hear it. But he needed to tell them, I'm going to suffer, I'm going to die, I'm going to rise again. He wanted to get the message across to them so that they would understand and be prepared for when he was gone.

[3 : 38] So now we're done with that. As we turn the corner into John chapter 10, Jesus has put himself back in harm's way, and who are the first characters that we see right out of the gate?

The Pharisees are back harassing him. Now before we go any further, I'm going to tell you a story that has nothing to do with Mark chapter 10. But you'll see that it's very relevant for human nature.

So probably, I want to say 10 or 15 years ago, when gay marriage was the political hot button, the CEO of Chick-fil-A was getting constantly harassed by the press.

What is your stance on gay marriage? And his consistent answer was, my stance on gay marriage is that I want to sell as much chicken to as many people as humanly possible for the best price possible.

I want to give them a great value for a great meal, period. But what's your stance on gay marriage? I want to sell as much chicken as humanly possible to as many people all over the country. What's your stance on gay marriage?

[4 : 39] And they wore him down because he knew this is a minefield. And he finally said, you know what? I disagree with gay marriage. Oh my goodness, they threw up their hands.

He made that disclosure right before Kara and I moved to Seattle in 2014. Chick-fil-A was slated to open a Chick-fil-A restaurant inside the city limits of Seattle.

The press made such a hue and cry over this scandalous declaration that Chick-fil-A hates gay people that there were huge protests that you probably never heard about and Chick-fil-A still doesn't have a restaurant inside the city limits of Seattle.

They opened a very, very lucrative business in Bellevue, however, which is one of the suburbs. But that minefield that the CEO of Chick-fil-A failed to avoid, Jesus saw it.

You're going to see that this morning as we go into Mark 10. Jesus, being a little bit smarter than the average human, knew how to navigate around that minefield. And as we talk about divorce and remarriage this morning, we're going to talk about how we can avoid that minefield as well in the 21st century.

[5 : 58] Because there's the same dangers. I'll come back to that and explain what I mean. So the other thing I want you to think about as we talk about divorce and remarriage is I really think that the church, Big C Church across the United States in particular, has made some pretty significant errors in judgment in how we handle divorce.

One is we don't avoid the mistake that Jesus was avoiding. We make rules. And I can tell you in my ministry life over the last 45 years, more than once I've encountered church leaders who have made a dogmatic statement, there will be no divorce in our church.

If you divorce, you're going to come under church discipline. Hard and fast. That's the rule. Did they help the families that were in crisis?

No. Did they have any sort of plan to nurture healthy marriages? No. We stink at that. Frankly.

They did offer crisis counseling, though, if your marriage is in trouble. So we have premarital counseling, hoping that we'll lay the seeds in the minds of people who haven't been married yet.

[7 : 19] Or we go all the way to the other extreme, and we've got crisis counseling if you're really in trouble, and we'll finally get to the point where you're asking for help, but nothing in between. We're going to spend a lot of time talking about that this morning.

We need to see what God's view is on marriage and understand what Jesus was doing here in Mark 10. So you're already there in Mark 10.

We're going to read verses 1 through 12. So follow along with me. Getting up, Jesus went from there, there being Caesarea Philippi, to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan.

Crowds gathered around him again, and according to his custom, he once more began to teach them. Quick side note. I think Jesus' teaching was pretty consistent.

I think it was pretty much essentially the Sermon on the Mount. And what the kingdom of God would look like as people repented and entered the kingdom and then lived that out.

[8 : 21] I think that was the core of Jesus' teaching. He was taking the good news and showing them how it applied to their specific needs and their specific circumstances of life. Jesus was consistently teaching.

He led with that even before he did healing or any other sorts of miracles, and we can't lose sight of that because that's a tool that we can use for sharing the gospel. Is respectfully, people like to complain, enter into their complaining, and share with them some facet of the gospel that addresses their particular and unique problems.

So once more, Jesus began to teach, and oh, what a surprise, some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing him. Now that's not asking questions to learn.

That's asking questions to trap. Just like the press was doing in my story about Chick-fil-A. They began to question him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

He answered and said to them, what did Moses command you? They said Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. But Jesus said to them, because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.

[9 : 33] But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. In the house, the disciples began questioning him about this again. And he said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

And if she divorces her husband, and marries another man, she is committing adultery. One side note, if you read the parallel passage in Matthew chapter 19, that last segment that Mark says was just between Jesus and the disciples, also either at a different time or just different views on the same event, doesn't really matter.

The fact is the Pharisees also got that last piece as well, according to Matthew's account. So that was clearly Jesus teaching.

His favorite thing to do, the Pharisees will go, oh, you think you guys know all the rules? You've got a pretty high bar. I'm gonna raise it. Look at what he did in the Sermon on the Mount.

[10 : 46] Oh, you think adultery is if you do a physical act with someone not your spouse. I'm gonna raise the bar. If you look at a woman with adulterous thoughts, guilty.

Oh, you think murder is actually taking somebody's life? No, sorry guys. If you get angry at somebody and call them a fool, murder.

He raised the bar. Part of the reason he raised the bar, and we're gonna come into this as we go through this passage on divorce, rules don't work. Rules don't work.

And even in the Pharisees' question, Jesus, show us a rule. They're putting the emphasis in the wrong place. The right question is not, how can we end a marriage?

The right question is, how can we preserve a marriage? How can we make it last? Are you with me? That's what we're gonna focus on this morning. So let's pray together. Father, thank you that you have given us a clear blueprint for what marriage should look like.

[11 : 51] You've given us a clear blueprint of how we should relate to each other both inside the bonds of marriage and outside. God, and like I was just saying, you raised the bar.

You want us to love as you loved. We can't do that without your help. We need you, Lord, to work in our lives, to work in our spirits, to show us what that means and to make it very practical in how we relate to one another.

God, help me and help us as we consider this passage this morning to take it to heart and apply it in every relationship that we're a part of. In Jesus' name, amen. Now, one of the potential errors I want to just cut off right out of the gate.

If you're single and you're thinking, oh, sweet, I don't have to pay attention today. This is on divorce and remarriage. Not a problem. Not applicable to me. Sorry, you don't get off the hook.

That's like somebody, when they hear that the sermon is on giving and they say, I don't have any money, so this sermon doesn't apply to me. Nope, sorry, it applies to you too. So, pay attention because the principles that lay the groundwork for a healthy marriage apply to all relationships, number one.

[13 : 08] Number two, I have met people who have gotten married at all seasons of life. So, don't assume that you're going to be single until the Lord returns or you die.

That you just never know. Stuff happens. So, you're not off the hook if you're single. Thank you. So, let's consider the context as we look at Mark chapter 10.

Like I said before, the Pharisees were not here to learn. They were here to put Jesus in a box and then use whatever box they put him in to find fault.

Because I guarantee you, no matter what answer Jesus would have given to that question, what do you say in commentary about Moses' command? They would have had grounds to attack him.

I'll tell you where they would have had grounds to attack Jesus. Think about his relationship with women in particular as you read through the gospel accounts. Several of the women that were associated with Jesus or that are highlighted in the gospels, particularly in John's gospel, were women who did not have healthy marriages.

[14 : 21] And I'll tell you, the first one you need to think about is his mother. From a human perspective, and you see this in John chapter 8 in the way the Pharisees talked to Jesus, Jesus' origins were always in question, particularly in Nazareth.

In the account in John chapter 8, the Pharisees make a snide remark about, oh, we know who our father is. Do you know who yours is? That's a shot at Mary.

It's a shot at Jesus. So that's there. It's interesting, too, that Matthew refers to Joseph as Joseph the Just. But Joseph the Just was not going to obey the letter of the law when he was dealing with the unexpected pregnancy of his fiancée.

Before Gabriel came, so before he had his eyes opened, Joseph was going to put her away quietly. I've read the Old Testament quite a bit.

I don't remember there being a you-don't-get-stoned loophole. If you get caught in adultery, the penalty was to be stoned. And yet Joseph the Just, it's not me saying it, the Bible, Joseph the Just was working his way around the law.

[15 : 43] Curious. Keep that in mind. Think about the woman at the well. She just didn't get divorced. She was good at it. Five times she'd been with different men.

Yet Jesus chose her. A Samaritan, a woman, according to his definition, a Syrian adulteress, a serial adulteress.

Jesus chose her as the first person to say, yep, I'm the Messiah. I'm the one. Why her? You really need to ask that question. We're considering the context of Jesus' statement specifically to the Pharisees in an isolated situation.

Then think about the woman caught in adultery in John chapter 8. I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more. What do you think about that? These are uncomfortable things because we think we know.

Well, Jesus said, don't divorce except for adultery. You have to look at the broader context of his life and even the context of this conversation and suddenly, maybe that dogmatic rule isn't so dogmatic after all.

[16 : 55] I think Jesus gave the orthodox answer. He did raise the bar because Moses' command, you can divorce your wife for any reason, so if your wife burns dinner two days in a row, sorry, sweetheart, you gotta go.

That's the reality in some contexts and that permission was there, which was devastating for a woman, by the way. Side note, which is gonna come into play as we talk about the role of divorce.

Did you know the number one predictor of poverty for a woman, regardless of where she lives, this isn't just in the third world, this isn't just in ancient times, the number one predictor for women to be in poverty is the birth of their first child and what puts them there is either being a child out of wedlock or the woman being the victim of divorce.

It's devastating. Divorce is devastating. And so, us making the mistake that the Pharisees did of just setting a rule doesn't deal with the realities biblically or even practically about how do we deal with the question, again, not of when divorce is permissible, but how do we ensure it doesn't happen in the first place?

How do we nurture healthy marriages? So, to give you kind of a background about Jesus' view of the law, I want you to think about the Sabbath because that was a common argument that Jesus had with the Pharisees.

[18 : 31] You've seen it. I used to think that Jesus laid awake at night and just thought, how can I really irritate the Pharisees? I know, I'm going to do a healing tomorrow. What's a really public place I can go into and just mess with their heads?

Well, I think that might be true. The more logical response is people were working Sunday through Friday.

They were spread all over the countryside. They were, it was largely an agrarian society. So, people are dispersed. But on Saturdays, they were in synagogue. They're all together or they're at the temple.

So, they're together. So, that's the time when people were available to be healed. And so, Jesus healed people. I'm going to take you to an example that was in Mark chapter 2 and Matthew chapter 12, if I remember correctly.

We're not going to turn there. I'm just going to tell you the story. But it's Saturday afternoon. The disciples are hungry. And they're gleaning in a wheat field.

[19 : 32] Gleaning is when you go through a wheat field, you are allowed to go into your neighbor's field and take what you could carry. You just couldn't harvest their property. It was a way of God providing, one of the ways that God provided for the poor.

Now, here's a thought that you may not have thought before because I didn't until I went into this passage. We always assume the Pharisees were always wrong. I don't think they were wrong.

Technically. I think when Jesus was called on the carpet for allowing his disciples to glean on the Sabbath, technically the Pharisees were right.

And I'll tell you why. I'll give you some things that the Pharisees would have been thinking about. Go all the way back in your Bible, especially those of you who have been in the Genesis study, to when the manna was given to the people of Israel.

They were told, go get manna in the morning, Sunday through Friday. Saturday, or Friday, you're going to get a double portion. Saturday, there's going to be nothing there. And, you know, several people went, well, I don't want to do a double portion on Friday or I forgot.

[20 : 40] And they went out in the fields and no manna. God didn't provide even for them on Saturday. He provided for them on Friday. There's a precedent directly from God. This is what it looks like.

Do the work Sunday through Friday. I'm not going to give you what you need on Saturday in violation of my law. If you look in Ezekiel, there's a whole section of Ezekiel, several chapters, where the number one attack that is levied against the people of Israel is you failed to keep the Sabbath.

You did not keep the Sabbath holy. Technically, I think the Pharisees had a case to say to Jesus, these guys shouldn't be gleaning on Saturday.

You should have packed a lunch. But Jesus' response is interesting. And I'm going to use comments and observations from two different events.

This one with the gleaning and the one in Matthew's account that's immediately following where Jesus heals a man that has a withered hand. So these are back-to-back. Jesus' response is interesting.

[21 : 54] First of all, judge with righteous judgment. He says that in John. I think we could say that he's used common sense. Use common sense. Why would you allow somebody to continue hurting when you have the means to fix that problem right now?

I have heard more than once many, many times over my ministry life this makes me cringe a little bit when I say this and it certainly got me going when I heard it.

God can follow the schedule. The Holy Spirit will work according to our schedule. What? No. Or the other mistake we make is they've waited like the woman that was hemorrhaging.

She's waited 18 years. Just heal her tomorrow. And Jesus' response was, no, she's waited 18 years. I have the ability to not have her suffer another minute.

We're not putting her off till tomorrow. That's not an option. Use common sense. And then he talked about this passage is also about circumcision.

[23 : 07] He says to the Pharisees, you circumcise on Saturday? Are you violating the law? Use common sense. If your ox falls into a hole on Saturday, you get it out on Saturday.

Isn't this person better than an ox? We're not going to wait. Then he refers back to a theme that you see in the Old Testament multiple times.

God desires compassion over sacrifice. He wants us to show compassion to people. You do not have a loophole.

I didn't show him compassion because it was Saturday. I'm off the hook. I'm on the way to church. I don't have to help that guy. If he's still there after church, I'll think about it.

No. Do it now. The principle is God wants us to be compassionate. And then the last piece, so those are comments that Jesus made. Use righteous judgment.

[24 : 10] God desires compassion, not sacrifice. And then is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath? And it was a rhetorical question because they knew, yes, it's lawful to show compassion on the Sabbath.

But the last one, this is out of Mark's gospel of the account of the healing of the withered hand. Jesus heals him. The Pharisees react.

Jesus has two reactions to the Pharisees. Anger and grief. That says a lot. That's an example, side note, of what Paul said in Ephesians.

Be angry and do not sin. Jesus was angry that those men put the well-being of a man who had suffered his whole life beneath the law.

Their rigid adherence to the law. So in something that is so cut and dried, the Sabbath isn't rocket science. It's pretty clear. Work six days a week, take the day off, focus on God.

[25 : 13] That's the Sabbath. And yet, Jesus muddies the water. Do you remember us talking about that last week and the weeks prior? Where Jesus will muddy the water and then walk away?

Implicitly saying, you got a brain, figure it out. Talk to God, pray about it, wrestle with the circumstances that you're in, but dogmatic rules don't really work because there's always loopholes.

Always there's loopholes. As soon as you lay down a rule, people are looking for loopholes. I'll give you an example. This is from the, from our time in the Dominican Republic. So, the woman who was my boss, my direct boss in the Dominican Republic, her name was Coco, is one of the most courageous people I've ever met.

Coco was in her middle, late 30s. She had a congenital birth defect and a slew of health issues that were downstream from that, from that birth defect. She was frail.

She had very, very limited endurance. Just watching her go upstairs was very difficult. And yet, she was serving orphans and literally hundreds of volunteers coming down to serve in the community in that context despite her, her shortcomings and the risks of being in a developing country with her health issues.

[26 : 37] Tremendously courageous woman. But, her way of coping with her world was to make rules for everything. Well, then they hired me.

My MO is, I want to get the results. And, I really place a high value on principles, which is what we're going to come to as we talk about marriage here in a few minutes.

But, I don't, if there's a rule, I'm sure there's a loophole in there somewhere. If I wasn't a pastor, I probably should have been an attorney. And so, I would come up with something fun to do that would be a way of reaching kids or connecting with the community or helping our volunteers be more effective and Coco would make a rule to box me in.

And then I would find another loophole and Coco would make another rule and then I'd dodge around that and she'd make up another rule. And we had this give and take to such a degree that one summer we decided we've got to have an employee manual.

We've got to codify this stuff so we know what we're talking about. Coco made rules so fast we gave up. The printer wasn't fast enough to keep up with all of her rules.

[27 : 50] But that's human nature. Rules are always a problem because we look for the loopholes. We need to be changed. Remember me talking about that?

We need to be transformed. So what are we supposed to do? As we look at this passage in Mark and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke it seems like Jesus lays down a pretty clear rule.

But then like I said his behavior toward the Sabbath his behavior toward women his behavior or even what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7 just kind of creates questions.

So what are we supposed to do? Tell you the first thing is we need to avoid the trap. Stop making rules. Period.

Stop making rules. Now I'm not saying I'm giving permission for people to get divorced because like Jesus as you get through you're going to see that I'm going to raise the bar a whole lot higher about what we do about marriage.

[28 : 58] But stop making rules. Because rules either motivate people to find loopholes or they hurt people if we dogmatically stick to them. So let's avoid that trap. I want you to turn to Malachi chapter 2 because this is another favorite passage for those who make a hard and fast rule about divorce.

Malachi chapter 2. We're going to be reading verses 13 through 16.

There's a lot of the people of Israel getting in trouble for things that they're violating against disobeying God's rules. So let me start with the end.

The last verse says, For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with wrong. That snippet is frequently taken out of context by people who want to make hard and fast divorce and remarriage rules and they say, See?

God hates divorce. That justifies my rule. Read the whole paragraph. paragraph, which by the way is a great principle when you're reading the Bible.

[30 : 24] Don't take things out of context. Read the whole passage. And this takes on a whole different perspective. This is another thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

Yet you say, for what reason? Let's stop there. prayer. This is a good principle. If you feel that God's not answering your prayers, if you look around and think, man, I'm just praying up to the ceiling and ricocheting right back down on my head, a good first step is to look in the mirror.

James calls the word of God a mirror. You need to look in the mirror. Why am I not seeing breakthrough in my life? Is there sin? Am I doing something wrong? That was the situation here.

They could tell that their sacrifice was not earning God's pleasure. It wasn't doing what they thought it should do. Malachi says, look in the mirror.

That's a good principle, to look in the mirror. Now, it's not always your fault. Let me make that clear. I don't want to create a culture of guilt, that if we don't see God working, it must be our fault.

[31 : 51] We're doing something wrong. We're not praying right. But, don't forget the principle. Look in the mirror first. Am I doing something or not doing something that God clearly expects me to do?

What do I need to change? So, yet you say, for what reason? Now, listen to this sentence. He's not talking about divorce.

Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

But no one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. In other words, if you're filled with the Spirit, you'll be a good husband, or at least a better one. But no one, but not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit.

And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. That's a totally different take on the next statement.

[32 : 59] God hates divorce when a husband divorces his wife because she burned dinner two nights in a row. Or she doesn't do things the way he thinks they should be done.

The husband's a problem here. Totally different take. For I hate divorce, says the Lord. But why does he hate divorce? Because it was being abused. It was being abused by men who were not filled with the Spirit, who were not caring for the wife of their youth, who failed to recognize what this relationship was designed by God to look like.

You follow me? This is not giving an excuse to create a rule about divorce. This is actually God saying, I hate divorce, fix your marriage.

Or, let's prevent the need to fix it, just do it right. But let's be honest, we're human, we'll probably have to fix something. So, as we turn the corner, what I want to focus on is the positive side of this.

What do we do to nurture healthy marriages? What does a healthy marriage look like? And this goes back to what I said, that this applies to everybody.

[34 : 19] Because the principles I'm going to tell you about marriage also apply to every relationship that you're a part of. They're universal. So, men, buckle your seatbelts.

I don't want to see any crying. Be tough, because I'm going to take you to the woodshed a little bit. And here's why. If you look at the teaching on marriage, the vast majority of the teaching is directed at husbands.

one of the things I've grown up hearing from young men is, I'm a godly young man, so I want a Proverbs 31 woman. And of course, the women think, I hate the Proverbs 31 woman, because she's at a bar I can't possibly reach.

And my response to these young men, who are pretty full of themselves, is, did you know who Solomon was writing to?

And they say, people. No. He was writing to his son. This is kind of an oversimplification, but it's not wrong.

[35 : 30] Do you know what the purpose of Proverbs 1 through 30, and actually 31 and a half, is? To train a man to be worthy of a Proverbs 31 woman.

So my answer to my pompous young friends who think they've got all the answers and they just need to find a woman who's worthy of them, dude, you've got 30 and a half chapters to work on. She's got like 10 verses. So how about not worrying about what the girls around you are failing to do and look in the mirror.

Because these principles are really directed at men. This passage in Malachi is directed at men. You look at Ephesians chapter 5, 22 to 33, 22 through 32 and a half are to men.

Actually, that's not true. 22 does say, wives submit to your husbands. So 22 and 33 B are to the wife, 34, no, 24, now I'm losing my numbers.

You know what I'm saying. I don't want to confuse myself because if I'm confused, you're almost certainly confused. You get my point. Men, we need to focus on taking care of our wives and nurturing them. We need to be aware of these women that God has entrusted to us.

[36 : 47] So I'm going to give you some very practical things. First of all, what is the summary of Ephesians chapter 5? Husbands, love your wife.

What does that mean? Well, Paul says in the passage, as Christ loved the church. Now what we automatically do is we say, well, Jesus died for me and the church, so I have to die for my wife.

That's not false. But sometimes we spiritualize things to such a degree that they really don't have any practical application. Because you could say, oh, I would die for my wife, but I'm not going to do anything to go out of my way to help her.

Sorry, folks, but dying for your wife is doing inconvenient things that help her. In a couple weeks, I'm going to be doing a sermon on leaders are servants.

if you take that passage and apply it to Ephesians 5, gentlemen, we serve our wives if we love them because we're the leader in our home, right?

[37 : 57] That's a very clear chain of thinking. So, love your wife, gentlemen. Your wife is hardwired to be a recipient and need, fundamentally need to be loved.

That's why Paul commanded it. Jesus, of course, was the author. And, important note, I think that the two clear commands in Ephesians 5, husbands, love your wives, wives, respect your husbands, are dealing with things that that particular spouse isn't very good at.

Men, let's be honest, we struggle to love well. We'll talk about that in a minute. Wives, it's easy to disrespect your husband. You know where all the dirty laundry is, literally.

So, the things that we're weak at, those are the things that God is specifically addressing to us. So, what does it mean to love your wife? Study your wife.

Now, every man who is married here, at one point in your life, you studied that woman. You learned what flour she likes. You learned what her favorite food was.

[39 : 09] You learned what not to do to suffer her wrath or to put your fledgling relationship in jeopardy. So, back then, you did study your wife.

You know how to do this. It never stops. We have to continually study our wives because, newsflash, our wives grow just like we do.

They change. Needs change. Interests change. Study your wife. Be aware of her needs. She has legitimate needs that God has called you to be the means of meeting them.

That's why you're together. So, study her. Here's a scary one, guys. Ask her. What do you need? What are you missing? Let me give you the alternative from my own experience.

parents? So, I did not want to ask that question when Kara and I were first decade of marriage. Well, I was in a ministry that I was really enjoying. I was working at least 80 hours a week through the summer.

[40 : 14] And somebody gave us a book on marriage by Gary Smalley. I'm sure some of you remember him. And there was a checklist for husbands and wives. It was like 100 items. And it said, highlight or check the boxes where your spouse needs work.

It's something like that. the whole page was yellow. I would have been a lot better off to just ask her. And it deeply convicted me.

That was one of the actual reasons we left that ministry. Because it created such an unhealthy environment in our house. But study your wife. Not as a scientist studies a bug.

Don't put her under a microscope. Study her through the lens of love. Be fascinated by her. Guys, if you're not fascinated by your wife, you need to study her more.

Because I think what you'll do is you'll rediscover what back in the day fascinated you about her and led you to love her early on. Does that make sense?

[41 : 16] So study your wife. The next one is be grateful for her. I want you to take some time by yourself. Go grab a cup of coffee.

Go for a walk. And really think, what does my wife do? And don't diminish the stuff that goes on around the house. What does my wife do?

Our house is in order. Kids are clothed. Or the grandkids are loved on. I have a sack lunch every day that she makes. Or I have dinner.

Or, you know, fill in the blanks. Or she goes to work. And she's working hard to earn a paycheck and still comes home and does this stuff. And let's be honest, probably a disproportionate share of the chores at home.

And really think, where does my wife show me respect? Oh, she really does. I know that my wife talks me up to other people.

[42 : 19] Think about that. here's a novel idea that oddly is almost as scary as asking your wife how you're doing. Tell her how much you appreciate her.

Now, you really should have your CPR training current because that might cause her to go into shock. But tell her.

Study your wife. Really dig deep on why you should be grateful for her and then tell her. Serve your wife.

There's going to be more on that in a couple of weeks. I'm not talking in highfalutin, grandiose, super spiritual terms. I'm talking really serve your wife. And I'm not going to go any further than that because I've got to preach on it in two weeks and I don't want to steal my thunder.

You just have to come back. But I'll tell you, servants serve. When you think about that. And then finally, this is pretty straightforward, take responsibility.

[43 : 22] Step up. Step up, guys. Do it. And by the way, this isn't for people who have just been married 10 years or 20. Kara and I celebrated our 38th wedding anniversary last week.

Great accomplishment. John and Kathy are a week ahead of us. Pete and Kathy are 53 weeks, or no, 51 weeks ahead of us. you guys celebrated 39, right?

They got to, we've got to do this. Jim and Carol, how long have you been married? 52 years. Yeah, applaud that. I think they're just, they're getting some things figured out.

I've got great hopes. There's no place where we stop this. So, wives, think about what I just said and do that.

Study your husband. I think women are better at this. But consciously choose to look at your husband through different eyes. Rethink maybe your assumptions about his motive for why he does things.

[44 : 32] We're all guilty at times of assigning motives to other people. But I think, ladies, you're good at it. Be wary of assigning motives to your husband's behavior.

Ask him, why'd you do that? I can't tell you the number of times I've met wives who are frustrated with husbands about things that they do and the husband says, I'm just trying to show her that I love her for crying out loud.

A little bit of communication issue there. But study your husband. Get to know him. Find out his motives. Do the things that you used to do for him.

Be grateful for him. Tell him that you're grateful. You know, it is absolutely a fact. We die on average six to eight years sooner than women do.

The burden of being a man is not, cannot be overstated. There's a great talk, just as a side note, Jordan Peterson, you've heard me talk about him certainly in private conversation.

[45 : 36] I have a lot of respect for the man. But he's confronted by a woman who talks about, she is arguing that there's this huge inequity between compensation for men and women. And part of Jordan Peterson's argument is, men die eight years younger.

There's a reason we die younger. We carry the burden. So ladies, thank your husband for doing that. He's literally shortened his life for you.

that's not hyperbole. Because he loves you. You may have a hard time telling it sometimes, but he does love you. Serve your husband.

I think you do that better than we do. And take responsibility for your own actions. Now, in both of those, what I mean is, quite simply, it's really easy to say, well, I don't do this because of her. I don't do that because of him.

No, no. No. That's not an option. Take responsibility for what you do. Regardless of what he or she does. Take responsibility.

[46 : 42] Study the scripture and see what it says we're supposed to do. And there's a really good sermon coming in two weeks that's really going to help you understand what it means to serve. So there you go. Shameless plug. And wives, really think about and ask your husband, what does it mean for me to respect you?

How do I show you respect? And do that. Because he will get better at loving you if he feels respected. Husbands, your wife will be more respectful of you if you love her well.

It's kind of a cool thing that God designed where it's reciprocating. And then the last application is for all of us. There is a lie that permeates American culture that has been devastating on the church and it doesn't get nearly enough press.

We're Americans. Americans. We're rugged individualists. We do everything on our own. And I have a right to my privacy so I really don't want you in my business. I'm sorry but actually throughout most of human history and most of the world in the present day, what you think is a right to privacy is a pipe dream.

When we lived in the Dominican Republic, our neighbors knew everything that we did, good or bad. people were talking about each other all the time which can be annoying, it can lead to gossip but you know what it also does?

[48 : 10] Keeps you on the straight and narrow. You're not going to step out on your spouse if all your neighbors figure it out. It's not going to happen. You're going to take care of your wife if people are talking about it.

We need to be in a community that knows each other well enough that we can say to each other, hey I saw what you did there. You know something? You loved your wife really well.

I saw that. We need to catch each other doing well. We need to encourage each other, ladies I saw you really respect your husband, that's cool.

That's a good role model, that's a good example. Flip side, we need to be close enough to each other to say, hey you know something? I'm seeing some trouble signs in your marriage.

One of the hardest conversations that I was ever on the receiving end of was a very close friend of mine when I was doing that 80 hour a week ministry, took me out for lunch and said, dude your marriage is in serious trouble and Kara's not going to tell you.

[49 : 14] You've got to make a change because here's what I see. That killed me. That and the yellow pages, you know the highlighted pages in that book that Kara read.

I'm a little slow learner so God had to give me two messages. We have got to have the courage to have those conversations with each other. To encourage and to say, hey man, there's danger.

There's problems. Let's address those. And I'm here to walk with you. I'm here to pray with you. We have got to do that for each other. And if we do that, this whole question of divorce that we started with is a moot point.

It would be so rare that we'll have to stop and think, well, what do we do? I don't know. We haven't faced this in 50 years. Can you imagine? That's God's design.

That's God's expectation. But we as a church need to be looking. Last point. We're done. We need to be looking for exemplary marriages.

[50 : 25] Elevate them. Compliment them. Follow that example. Regardless of where they are. We need to follow that example. And that husband and wife relationship is a model for how we should be relating to each other in the church.

Let's keep marriage on a very high, high level. Because that's where God holds it. God hates divorce. Deeply and passionately. But the solution isn't to make rules about divorce.

The solution is to make sure that our marriages in this congregation are thriving. Thriving. Right. Father, thank you that we are your bride.

We're the bride of your son. And that he gives us a model of what a marriage is supposed to look like. Lord Jesus, you love us.

You nurture us. You look out for our needs. And we will appear at the marriage supper of the Lamb, Lamb, radiant with beauty.

[51 : 30] Because you're a good husband. God, I pray that we would be like that. And that our marriages would become a springboard to share the gospel with people wherever we go.

because they just see that we've got great marriages. And they're jealous. Lord, I pray for each marriage in this building that you would bless us.

Help us to work together as husbands and wives to nurture each other. Help us as married couples to come alongside of other married couples and to be proactive about asking advice and help to be better.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.