

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 1 **“GOD’S PURPOSE AND POWER FOR YOUR MARRIAGE”**

“I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead...” Ephesians 1:19

I’ve had a great time learning with you about some different family matters over the past few weeks. It’s time we turn our attention to the foundational relationship in every family; the husband and wife. Knowing full well there are no guarantees...I’m still of the opinion that when we can grow and make our marriages strong, we have a better chance of creating a healthy family. It is true, at some point in every family, husbands and wives need to devote some time to strengthening their own relationship...I hope this summer series will help you do just that.

Just to be very clear, and very honest; this is now the third time I’ll be preaching this series of messages on Marriage. Each time I’ve revised them, added stuff, deleted stuff, but throughout each I’ve borrowed heavily from other authors, primarily among them I’ll mention 4. Rick Warren preached about marriage a number of years ago, and I’ve “borrowed” some of his ideas. Gary Smalley wrote a book called Love is a Decision a number of years ago, and it has been a good source for me. Dr. Willard Harley, a clinical marriage counselor wrote a classic book called: His Needs, Her Needs: how to affair proof your marriage. And Gary Thomas wrote a book called Sacred Marriage. I’ve used thoughts, illustrations and work from each of these writers to compile this series. I hope it will be as helpful to us today, as it has been in each of it’ previous offerings.

I begin with this premise...this question: “What if God’s primary purpose for your marriage was not your **happiness**, but also your **holiness**?”

You see, I think that many modern day problems arise in marriage because many young (and some not so young) married couples; believe a fundamental lie; that the institution of marriage exists to make me/you/us happy.

Marriages are designed by God to 'increase' our happiness, and statistics prove it works; but we must remember that God often has a deeper purpose; God has designed marriage to make us holy, not just happy! When we can get our heads around that concept, when we can begin to implement this truth, when we can become part of the fulfillment of this strategy for our spouse, and in our marriage...I think we'll be off and running to stronger marriages and healthier families.

My primary premise today is that every relationship has primarily 3 basic stress points, and God has apportioned His own power to help us as human beings to deal with those stress points, whether with our spouses, our kids, our co-workers, or even our friends. The three relationship stress points are:

1- Unexpected **Differences**

2- Unmet **Needs**

3- Unforgiven **Mistakes**

The good news of the Gospel we just read, is that God says He will give all of us the same power He used to raise Jesus from the dead to help us grow our relationships, and our marriages. God wants to give you power to do these three things in your marriage:

1. THE POWER TO “FATHOM” YOUR MATE’S DIFFERENCES.

I chose the word 'fathom' even though I know it's not a word we use a whole lot. It means, "to understand the depth of something." If you're going to have a successful, satisfying marriage you have to understand the depth of the differences between you and your husband or you and your wife.

Before a couple gets married, all they can see is how alike they are. After the wedding...all they can see is how different they actually are. I think part of the reason we are so different is a reflection of God's sense of humor! He puts opposites together to watch the sparks fly! If you are like most couples:

One of you is an early riser, the other a night owl.
One of you is daring and impulsive, and the other is cautious and reserved.
One of you says, "I play by the rules," the other says, "Rules were made to be broken."
One of you loves to talk; the other is a bump on a log.
One you loves to spend money, the other is a tightwad.
One of you loves to cuddle, the other is a porcupine.
One of you is a firecracker, the other is a dud.
One of you says, "Drop everything!"; the other says "Drop Dead!"
One of you is neat and organized and on time, the other is 'flexible, mellow, late.'

Differences aren't wrong, they're just different. Differences bring balance to a marriage. Marriages need that balance. In fact, the greater the differences the greater your potential for growth in marriage! Marriages where there are no differences, where the two are exactly alike, same weaknesses, same problems, are often boring to tears! God allows these differences in your marriage for your growth. The first foundation of a Godly marriage is coming to understand, ("FATHOM"), that God made you different from each other, and to appreciate, and actually come to enjoy, those differences.

Secondly, God wants to give you:

2. THE POWER TO "FULFILL" YOUR MATES NEEDS.

"The man should fulfill his duty as a husband and the woman should fulfill her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the others needs." I Corinthians 7:3

Maybe we should circle the word satisfy! Men, you need to understand that women want their men to fulfill their needs...without them having to tell us what they are...without having to draw a diagram or road map. But the fact is, ladies...we're just not that smart! Like this guy I read about recently.

A couple were seeing a counselor for marriage problems. The wife refused to talk to her husband. Week after week, the counselor tried to get the wife to open up, but nothing worked. Finally, on the 7th visit, the counselor got up, walked over to the woman, and planted a wet, juicy kiss, firmly on her lips. You could see the change immediately; she just lit up, reached over to her husband and began to pour out to him all the stress she'd been going through the past three months.

After a lull, the counselor said, “Mr. Jones, that kiss represents the kind of treatment your wife needs everyday.”...The husband thought a minute...”Well, Doc, I can bring her in on Mondays’ and Wednesday’s but I’m not sure about the rest of the week.”

Typical, men just don’t get it sometimes. Often meeting our mate’s needs is a skill that must be taught, and learned. It begins with another basic recognition. Each of us as human beings have some needs that only God can meet. Our needs for significance, self-worth and identity, can only be met by God. To look at our spouse to meet these needs will only lead to frustration.

We see this in the trophy bride syndrome, where some women find their identity in their husbands, or more accurately in what their husbands do, and some men look for affirmations of their manhood in the outward beauty of their wives. Likewise, God has designed us as males and females with some needs only our spouse can meet. Dr. Willard Harley in his famous book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, discusses at length how to recognize and meet your spouse’s needs, I’ll be talking about those needs in a few weeks.

I think a vast majority of problems in marriage could be solved by understanding and applying this next verse:

“Look out for each other’s interests, not just for your own.” Philippians 2:4

For the record, I believe that **SELFISHNESS** is one of the major stress points in many marital problems or issues! Beneath many of the problems most marriages encounter is selfishness. Sometimes people don’t like my counseling, because I point out this issue, and tell them. “You just need to stop being so selfish.”

Have you ever noticed how the focus shifts after you get married? Before marriage the focus is: “What can I do to please you?” That’s called dating. After you get married, too often it’s “Get it yourself!”

Before marriage you would do almost anything to spend time together, after the wedding; football (or shopping) becomes the most important event on the planet. Often I suggest to couples that they keep dating after they are married. Keep doing the things they did to win each other's affections. If couples in conflict would shift their focus off themselves, and go back to doing the things that helped them fall in love, many of their problems might take care of themselves.

Remember marriage is God's idea. The writer of Ecclesiastes uses a rope as a metaphor to teach that marriage takes 3, a husband, a wife and God. "*A triple braided cord is not easily broken.*" Taking God out of the equation for marriage is a recipe for disaster.

Even having God in marriage is not a guarantee. But for my money, I'll choose to allow God to help grow my marriage.

There are times in most marriages when we just don't physically or emotionally have the strength to meet our spouse's needs. Then, we need to rely more deeply on the patterns of depending on God that we hopefully have built over our lifetime; to find in God the resources we need to meet our spouse's needs. It's sometimes not easy, but that is the only way I know we can do it satisfactorily. God wants to empower you, with the same power He used to raise Jesus from the dead, to meet your spouses needs! And thirdly God wants to give you:

3. THE POWER TO "FORGIVE" YOUR MATE'S MISTAKES

If you haven't learned the two laws of reality yet, let me clue you in: The first law of reality is this: #1 You married an imperfect person. #2 You're not so hot yourself!. When two imperfect people get in a marriage, they inevitably hurt one another. Even when they love each other, they sometimes hurt each other intentionally, sometimes unintentionally.

When your spouse makes a mistake you have two choices:

RUB IT IN OR RUB IT OUT! How? Listen to this verse from

Ephesians 4:31: *“Let there be no more bitter resentment or anger, no more shouting or slander, and let there be no bad feelings of any kind among you.”*

Don't hold on to your hurts. Some of you have a partner who has made a major mistake; maybe months or even years ago, and you can't let it go. You are killing your marriage. You have become an unpleasable spouse. No matter what they do for you, how good, nice, kind, romantic, gentle, whatever...in the back of your mind, you have this scale that says: “yes, they did that good...but they did all that bad.” By keeping score you are killing your marriage.

That's a clear as I can say it. Paul says it better: *“Love keeps no score of wrongs, does not gloat over others sins, but delights when the truth wins out*

Forgiving a spouse can be easier...when we remember how much God has forgiven us. Maybe part of our marriage problem is actually an issue of unforgiveness between us and God? When I really feel forgiven by God, guilt free, clear conscious—not because I deserve it by any means, but because of His grace, because He loves me – then I find it easier to be forgiving of Susan. This is an issue some of us need to face. Before we feel like trying to understand our mate's differences, before we feel like fulfilling our mate's needs, we've got to forgive our mate's mistakes. And that may be secondary to receiving God's forgiveness personally, intimately, immediately for ourselves!

That's a difficult thing, and only possible by the grace and love of God. Don't go looking somewhere else to find help, don't seek advice from some other source, turn to God, and trust Him for the power you need to forgive, fulfill, and fathom your spouse. Some people go looking for help where the grass looks greener, on the other side of the fence. The truth is, the grass is not greener on the other side of the fence, and it's not greener on this side of the fence either.

The truth is the grass is greener where you water (and fertilize) it! I'd guess some of us need to pour some water on our spouses, invest some effort in our marriages, maybe even take care of some things in our selves.

As we close this service, I want you to think about God's forgiveness. Have you received it? God wants to clear your conscious. Beginning the process of building a Godly marriage, which, by design will make you holy and happy...begins with accepting God's forgiveness. You don't have to understand it all, you just have to accept it. Today, I'd like to invite you to say "yes" to Jesus Christ. "Yes, God, I'd like to receive your forgiveness". In your own heart say, "Jesus Christ, as much as I know how, come into my life, save my marriage, save my life. Make me the person you want me to be. Make me the husband/wife, you know my spouse needs me to be. Make me like you, by the power of the Resurrection.

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God’s primary purpose for your marriage is not just your _____,
but also your _____?”

all relationships have the same 3 basic stress points:

- 1- Unexpected _____
- 2- Unmet _____
- 3- Unforgiven _____

God says He wants to give you three things:

1. THE POWER TO “_____” YOUR MATE’S DIFFERENCES.

2. THE POWER TO “_____” YOUR MATE’S NEEDS.

“The man should fulfill his duty as a husband and the woman should fulfill her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the others needs.” I Corinthians 7:3

I believe that the root problem in marriage is _____!

3. THE POWER TO “_____” YOUR MATE’S MISTAKES.

When your spouse makes a mistake you have two choices:

_____ **OR** _____!

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Study Guide

1. Consider and discuss the theory that God has created the institution of Marriage to help make you holy, not just to make you happy.
2. Cite examples of marriages based only on happiness, and some built on holiness as the primary purpose.
3. Consider and share some of the differences you have discovered in your spouse since you were married?
4. How have you handled those differences?
5. Consider and share the role selfishness plays in creating unmet needs in a spouse.
6. Do you find it hard to forgive your spouse? What makes it hard? What makes it easier?
7. Are there things in your life God needs to forgive? Share if you wish, then pray for God’s forgiveness for each other and yourself.