

## FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 11: “SURVIVING MARITAL STORMS”

Matthew 7: 24-25 & I Corinthians 3:10

Before I begin this morning I want to express my profound appreciation to those of you who are not married, either by choice, circumstance or by death. You have been faithful troopers hanging in while we've discussed this important subject...though it might not be that important to you. I want you to know that this series has been used by God to minister and reach a number of folks; my counseling load can attest to that fact.

I've mentioned throughout this series some of the things I do while performing wedding ceremonies. Here is another. When couples exchange rings I often remind them of some of the deep symbolism contained in those rings. One of which, (maybe the most profound) is that each ring is made of precious metal. That metal has been through many hours of a 'refiners' fire, making the gold or silver pure. The hotter the fire the purer the gold, I often say. Here is the point: most marriages will have to endure some "refining fire". Most marriages will go through some storms, some crisis' some circumstances that shake and rock our lives, our world, certainly our marriages. How do we survive them is today's chosen subject.

It is time to put into practice what we have been talking about these past few weeks. Let's consider our first text: Matthew 7:24-25:

*“Everyone who hears these words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The rains came down, the floods rose and the winds blew against the house; yet it didn't fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

These verses contain the message for this morning. Matthew says there will be at least 3 different kinds of assailants arising against our homes; the rains, the floods, and the winds. He also remarks that homes built on a solid foundation can withstand every storm.

The foundation is Jesus, and doing what God says regarding your marriage. I want us to be prepared for whatever kinds of storms may come our way, so our houses, our homes, our marriages; literally our lives will be able to stand. We need to Be Prepared for...

## **1. THE “RAINS” – THE CULTURE WE LIVE IN**

Without much question or debate most would agree that our current culture is tough on what's considered 'traditional' marriage.

George Gallup (of the Gallup Poll) has written a book called Forecast 2000. In one chapter titled The Faltering Family, he records Four Forces that are eroding marriages and families in our American Culture:

- (1) Alternative Life Styles. He predicted, and we are seeing living, daily proof of the mass confusion about roles and goals concerning 'alternative' (often sinful) lifestyles. How many happy, normal families do you see portrayed on TV these days?
- (2) Radical Feminism. Much of the Feminist movement has legitimate merit, but Radical Feminism that advocates a woman's rights outweigh every other right are just as selfish as chauvinism, and just as stupid. The attitude of "I've got to be me, even if it means leaving my husband and family to go and do my own thing", is crippling to both males and females.
- (3) Materialism. The pressures to have more and more. Families are so busy trying to make a living that they are missing life! They are never home together.

They are working way to hard to buy stuff they don't need to impress people they don't even like.

- (4) The Sexual Revolution. We need look no further than this quote from a former President: “We must stop beating each other up on the altar of unattainable morality.” Is it really unattainable? Only if you don’t want to attain it!

Should we be surprised that these things are happening in our culture today?

The Bible says that as the time gets closer to Jesus’ return we’re going to find cultures like that.

*“In the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian...People will become utterly self-centered, greedy for money...proud and abusive...they will be utterly lacking in gratitude, normal affections, self-control, and will be violent and loving pleasure instead of loving God.” 2 Tim. 3: 1-4*

Does that sound current to you? You can’t read that and wonder if the Bible really speaks or relates to current life! It reads like today’s newspaper. We don’t have time to go into all of these, but there are three ideas in our culture that can erode your marriage that we must consider. These will sap the strength from your relationship if you let them. Ideas that can erode your marriage:

- (1) **HUMANISM** Which can basically be defined as “self-centeredness”.

Humanism is the desire to put ‘me first’. “I’ve got to do what’s best for me.” Once you are married your “me” becomes “we”. You’ve got to say: “What’s best for US?” When people say they are incompatible, that’s just a code word for selfishness. It means I’m not willing to change or give in!

- (2) **MATERIALISM** “greedy for money”.

We can become so over committed and overextended trying to keep up with the neighbors, that we don’t have time for each other any more. The Pre-Nuptial agreement is an example.

Did you see the recent B.C. cartoon? B.C. is looking up the definition of pre-nuptial agreement in a dictionary. "Pre-nuptial is an agreement between two people who love each other...almost as much as they love their possessions."

Like the lady who married four different husbands: a millionaire, then a film producer, then a butler, and finally an undertaker. Someone asked her why she did that. She said, "I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go."

(3) **HEDONISM** "loving pleasure"... The Old Playboy philosophy of loving pleasure more than loving God. It's the philosophy; "if it feels good, do it." We live in an age of instant gratification. Forget morality, just do whatever feels good.

A man wrote to Dear Abby awhile back: "I'm in love and having an affair with two different women. I can't marry them both. Please tell me what to do, but don't give me any of that morality stuff. Abby's answer this time, was classic. "Dear sir, the only difference between humans and animals, is morality. I suggest you write your veterinarian."

How should a Christian respond to a culture that says: "Me first, money first, pleasure first, and forget everything else?" Romans 12:2 says:

*"Don't copy the behavior and the customs of this world but be a new and different person."* In order to deal with the first storm – the rains of culture, which erode relationships, - we've got to counteract the culture, by rejecting its standards, and clinging close to Jesus and Him alone. The second thing we need to be prepared for:

## **2. THE "FLOODS" - THE CRISES YOU WILL LIVE THROUGH**

In Rick Warren's sermon from this series he listed the top 12 most stressful crises that a marriage can experience:

- (1) Death of a Child
- (2) Jail Sentence
- (3) An Unfaithful Spouse

- (4) Major Financial Difficulty or Bankruptcy
- (5) Business Failure
- (6) Being Fired
- (7) Miscarriage or Stillbirth
- (8) Court Appearance
- (9) Unwanted Pregnancy
- (10) Major Illness in Family – cancer or heart disease
- (11) Unemployed for over a month
- (12) Death of a Close Friend.

These crises are often inevitable and may well come into your life. They usually come unannounced, with no warning in advance. They just sneak up on you and engulf you and sometimes overwhelm you, like David was when he penned the 69<sup>th</sup> Psalm:

*“Save me, O God. The Floods have risen. Deeper and deeper I sink in the mire’ and the waters rise around me. I have wept until I am exhausted.”*

Have you ever felt like that, like you’re going under for the last time, being swallowed up, drowning, sinking? Some of you may feel that way this morning. You feel like your marriage or your life is about to go under. What should you do? Isaiah reminds us:

*“God says, ‘Don’t be afraid. When you go through deep waters and great troubles, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.”*

It sounds so simple doesn’t it? But what a great promise! When you’re in over your head, there are 3 things you must do:

(1) **RELAX IN GOD’S PLAN**. Relaxing in your own plan may be one of the contributing factors, so we better not do that. But God’s plan is perfect, even when we can’t seem to see it. Don’t get uptight. Don’t worry. Warren says in his newest book, “if you know how to worry, then you know how to meditate.” I like that, meditation is just worry focused on God, instead of the problem. God’s purpose and plan for your life is always more significant and more powerful than the problems you are facing.

Yes, we will have problems, yes there may be a crisis, but remember floods diminish and we need to hang on!

(2) **RECOGNIZE GOD'S PRESENCE.** Whenever you go through deep waters and great troubles, he says: *"I will be with you."* You are never alone when you're going through a crisis. You may think you are, but you're not! God is with you. When the floods come, remember and hang on to the promise that God is with you.

(3) **RELY ON GOD'S PROTECTION.** *"When you go through the rivers of difficulty, you will not drown."* That's a promise you can count on. You may get wet, you may lose the house, but you're not going to drown! God is with you and He has a plan for you, and if you rely on God's way to protect you, you will get through it! We can't go around marital floods, and we can't get over marital floods, we have to go through them. When the crises of life come in marriage, your options are: either walk through it together, or you can walk out alone! The tragedy is because so few marriages are built on the solid foundation, when the floods come, the parties are swept off their feet, often in two different directions.

The key to surviving a marital flood is your commitment to each other, and your covenant with God. Remember, commitment means being willing to be miserable for a while. Commitment means being willing to be unhappy while you work out the problems. Instead of walking out, you hang in there even though it stinks, and you're getting drenched! The third thing we need to be prepared for:

### **3. THE "WINDS" – THE CHANGES YOU WILL LIVE WITH**

Change is part of life. The only things in this world that don't change, are dead, inanimate! Everything changes with time, except God. *"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."* Ecc. 3:1 Everything has a season, including marriages. There's the honeymoon stage, the blissful childless couple stage, the decision to have children, and how many stage, raising young children stage, preschool stage, grade school years, the parenting teenagers stage (the stage you think will never end...does)

College years, thrusting the child from the home, welcoming them back home, thrusting again, the empty nest syndrome, and finally retirement. Life changes. If you don't learn how to adapt to change, your marriage will not likely be very fulfilling, and may not survive.

Your marriage is dynamic, not static; it's getting better or it's getting worse, deteriorating or improving, growing together, or growing apart. No marriage stands still. We change emotionally as time goes on. We change intellectually. We change spiritually if we are listening. We change physically too. I never understood why people would marry for looks. (And am glad my wife didn't!) Beauty doesn't last forever. Marrying a person because of looks is like buying a car because of the color! Color's fade.

When changes come into your marriage and into your life and family you have several options: You can reject it and pretend it doesn't exist! You can resist it and fight against the change. You can resent it, and be demoralized by it. Or you can relish it and make the most of it!

Then what is the secret for coping with the winds of change? *"I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be...I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives within me."* Phil. 4:11,13 Paul says there are three attitudes you need to cope with the changes that are going to happen in your life and marriage.

(1) **CONTENTMENT** *"I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances..."* Contentment means enjoying the present. Don't say, "When we get a bigger house, then I'll be happy." "When we have kids, then we'll be happy." "When the kids leave then we'll be happy." Don't let circumstances be the source of your happiness. Learn to enjoy the present, even without the best circumstances.

(2) **FLEXIBILITY** *“I am ready for anything...”* Be willing to adapt.

Change. There is that word again. You, your mate, your marriage, and your family are changing all the time. If you are not flexible, you'll likely be blown apart, or ruin your relationships by your inflexibility.

(3) **FAITH** *“I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives within me.”* You need to say: “I'm trusting Christ to help me in the changes that I know are going to take place in my life and marriage.” Why was the shield called Faith in the Armor of God? Because the shield was movable. Faith is movable, able to be applied wherever you are being attacked or forced to change.

If you don't have a strong foundation there are many storms that will batter your life and marriage, we don't have time to mention them all. The Rains of culture, marked by Humanism, Materialism, and Hedonism; the Floods of crises that will suddenly come can cause you to drift apart. The Winds of Change can blow you in opposite direction if you're not prepared, or blow you closer together if you are.

How can we make our marriages survive life's storms? By building them on a solid foundation:

*“God has placed Jesus Christ as the one and only FOUNDATION and no other FOUNDATION can be laid.”* I Cor. 3:10. Spiritual unity acts as the cement in the center of any relationship. I have a singular word for each of you as I close. No matter your age, or length of marriage, no matter if you are single, married, divorced, widowed, or yet to be married. PUT JESUS CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE, AND AT THE CENTER OF ALL YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD YOUR LIVES ON THAT SURE FOUNDATION. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, which no storm, no storm can overcome!

## FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 10: “SURVIVING MARITAL STORMS”

Matthew 7: 24-25 & I Corinthians 3:10

*“Everyone who hears these words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The rains came down, the floods rose and the winds blew against the house; yet it didn’t fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

### Be Prepared for...

#### 1. THE “\_\_\_\_\_” – THE \_\_\_\_\_ WE LIVE \_\_\_\_\_

*“In the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian...People will become utterly self-centered, greedy for money...proud and abusive...They will be utterly lacking in gratitude...normal affections...self-control, and will be violent and loving pleasure instead of loving God.” 2 Tim. 3: 1-4*

#### Cultural ideas that can erode your marriage:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. THE “\_\_\_\_\_” - THE \_\_\_\_\_ YOU WILL LIVE \_\_\_\_\_

*“Save me, O God. The Floods have risen. Deeper and deeper I sink in the mire’ and the waters rise around me. I have wept until I am exhausted.”*

#### When you’re in over your head, there are 3 things you must do:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ IN GOD’S \_\_\_\_\_.

(2) \_\_\_\_\_ GOD’S \_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_ ON GOD’S \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 3. THE “\_\_\_\_\_” – THE \_\_\_\_\_ YOU WILL LIVE \_\_\_\_\_

*“I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be...I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives within me.” Phil. 4:11,13*

#### three attitudes you need to cope with the changes:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_  
*“I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances...” .*

(2) \_\_\_\_\_  
*“I am ready for anything...”*

(3) \_\_\_\_\_  
*“I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives within me.”*

## **FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 10: “SURVIVING MARITAL STORMS”**

Matthew 7: 24-25 & I Corinthians 3:10

*“Everyone who hears these words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The rains came down, the floods rose and the winds blew against the house; yet it didn’t fall, because it had its foundation on the rock*

### **Study Guide:**

- 1) Share some of the ‘storms’ your marriage has been through, and how you survived them.
- 2) Of the three cultural ideas that can erode a marriage, share the one your relationship is most struggling with. Why do you think that is so? What might you do to overcome that?
- 3) Flesh out the 3 things we are to do when in over our heads. Share examples of how you have done those, or how you wish you could do them.
- 4) Of the 3 attitudes discussed, which of them do you think is the hardest for you to do? Which of the three do you think might be most helpful in your marriage or situation right now?
- 5) Share with each other some prayer requests of friends or family that are struggling with these issues or in their marriage. Spend some time praying for one another, and each others requests.