

SS, Marriage, M&F, Keeping a Marriage Strong, outline

4/23/23

NOTE: Due to illness, I was unable to prepare lecture notes on and teach this lesson. Instead, the class listened to a video message by John Piper, taken from a series on marriage, “Forgiving and Forbearing”. The outline below is from Jim Newheiser’s book, Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage, Ch. 11, “What is the Key to Keeping a Marriage Strong?”

INTRODUCTION: Did God himself have a marriage that was less than strong and healthy? In a theocratic sense, Israel was God’s son and God’s bride (Is. 54:5; Hosea 2:2; entire book of Hosea). Yet, as a whole, Israel was characteristically an unfaithful spouse. The marriage was not strong. The Lord, of course, was outstanding in his steadfast love. Yet, this biblical illustration reminds us that it takes two parties to have a strong marriage. That said, one spouse can be outstanding in godliness, even if the other is not.

PRINCIPLES and PRACTICES for KEEPING a MARRIAGE STRONG

1. Prayerfully pursue a growing experiential knowledge of the love of Christ.

Eph. 5:31-32 *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Earthly marriage is ultimately about the heavenly marriage, the permanent union of Christ and his people. How we do the former reflects largely on our experience of the latter. Our obstinate tendencies towards pride, selfishness, and unbelief can only be overcome at the foot of the cross and the empty tomb. Nothing is more important to marriage than that we grow in humility, mercy, love, grace, forgiveness, patience, and self-sacrifice. God’s love for us in Christ is where we best learn and grow in these traits. **1Jn 4:19; Eph. 3:14-10**

Jer. 2:11-13 *Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.* ¹² *Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD,* ¹³ *for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

Our ability to serve our spouse is deeply impacted by whether we have found Christ to truly be sufficient and delightful, or whether we are still inclined to find our strength and joy in things below, such as in marriage. God never intended earthly marriage to take the place of the heavenly. PD Tripp’s book, What Did You Expect?, insightfully exposes our deep instinct to expect too much from our spouse and from our experience of marriage. Christ himself is the Living Water, the refuge and relief of our souls.

2. Be determined that your love, like God’s, will flow from grace, not law.

It is a blessing that the Law of God is binding on his people. Some of those laws bear very directly on marriage, such as the pledge to cherish our spouse, forsaking all others. Yet, God's Law, while good, did not and could not win us. Only grace could. And the same is true in marriage. **Titus 3:5-6; Eph. 5:1-2; 1Ti. 1:15; Gal. 6:1; 1Jn. 1:8-9; Rom. 2:4**

3. Be committed to fighting for your marriage, refusing to let your feelings or circumstances hijack your devotion.

We often don't feel like loving God. And the same is true in marriage. Scripture does not tell us to be "carried along" by the Spirit but to "WALK by the Spirit". Only thus will we not carry out the desires of the flesh. It's a walk. It's also a battle. A war is going on within regarding our desires. We must be willing to fight. Our spouse's sins and weaknesses may be the occasion of temptation, but they cannot make us fleshly. We alone can choose that. **Eph. 5:16-24; 1Co 10:13**

4. Be determined to endure to the end.

"For better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, until God by death parts us." Over the years of a marriage, you will change and your spouse will change. Circumstances will change. You cannot know in your 20's what you may face in your 30's, 40's, 50's, and so on. Physically, the trajectory goes down once you reach middle age.

God has loved us with an everlasting love (**Jer. 31:3**). He promised to never leave nor forsake us (**Heb. 13:5**). Contrary to what the world conveys in movies and books, true love is not easy. It doesn't just happen. The goal is not to find "our true soul mate". The objective is to be like God, displaying him for all to see, especially your spouse.

5. Return again and again to the standard and description of love set forth in 1Co 13.

1Co 13:4-7 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

CHAPTER 14: "WHAT MUST BE DONE TO PROTECT A MARRIAGE?"

- 1. Do not take each other for granted.**
- 2. Make your personal walk with the Lord a priority.**
- 3. Remain involved in a strong church.**
- 4. Quickly and completely resolve conflicts. Eph. 4:26-27**
- 5. Be honest with each other. Eph. 4:25**
- 6. Be circumspect in your dealings with the opposite sex.**
- 7. Be gracious to each other. Ps. 103;10; Col. 3:12-14**